



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



A D V E N T U R E S

OF AN

A C T O R :

COMPRISING

A PICTURE OF THE FRENCH STAGE

DURING A

PERIOD OF FIFTY YEARS.

EDITED BY

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THE FRENCH STAGE.

CHAPTER XVII.

My old rival Desforbes.—His success as a dramatist.—The *Femme Jalouse*, and *Tom Jones*.—The *Comédie Italienne*.—Granger.—A comparison.—The Chevalier de Boufflers.—His mysterious message.—Explanation.—Dramatic reading.—M. Suard and his epigrams.—The Countess de Montesson's play.—Her literary talents.—Performance of *La Comtesse de Chazelles* at the *Comédie Française*.—Its failure.—Unjust disapprobation.—Alterations.—Noble resolution of Madame de Montesson.—Withdrawal of the play.—Treachery.—Singular and disgraceful stratagem.—The statues of Friendship and Beneficence.—The *Conspiration des Perdrix*.

THE success of Desforbes as an author, at the *Comédie Italienne*, was very gratifying to me. I was among the foremost in applauding his essays in dramatic literature. Between two old rivals there frequently exists a sort of fraternity. Both have loved the same woman, and by a singularity peculiar to the tender passion, the cause of enmity at one period of life, namely, the sympathy of taste

and feeling, will become the ground of friendship at another period, when the conflict of passion is past, and reason has resumed her sway. The triumph of the favoured lover may be attributed to his cunning, or the caprice of the lady, and the rivals may, after time has cooled their ardour, mutually compliment each other on the good taste apparent in their choice, both having made the same. The friendship that grows out of rivalry is of all others the most cordial ; it has its source in the feelings most strongly rooted, and most permanent in the heart of man—vanity and self-esteem.

Desforbes had already produced “Tom Jones” at the Comédie Italienne, and on the same stage his “Femme Jalouse” was now crowned with unqualified success. The talent of Desforbes, as a dramatist, had broken out suddenly and at once. He escaped the noviciate which almost every literary man is doomed to pass through, which causes young works to be, in almost every instance, the production of old heads.

The comedy of “La Femme Jalouse” was a very clever production. The principal character boldly drawn and well sustained ; a plot not devoid of interest, though the spectator is let a little too soon into the secret ; several secondary characters judiciously interwoven with the action,

especially that of a young girl, a charming portraiture of grace and ingenuousness:—such were the elements which insured the success of the “*Femme Jalouse*.” The piece was nightly performed to crowded audiences. Were it not a well-known fact that my old rival took his ideas from a popular English comedy, I should have suspected that he had copied his traits of jealousy from our mutual idol, the lovely Clermonde, who was often the victim of that tormenting disease. But the excellent and truly-original characters of *Aranville* and *Dorsan* were the creations of Desforges. My opinion may be incorrect; but it appears to me, that in dramatic writing the creation of character is more important than the invention of plot. For the one task, profound observation and mature judgment are required; for the other tact and imagination are indispensable; a sort of imagination, however, with which Molière could well afford to dispense. Desforges had an admirable conception of dramatic character. No writer has managed to invest with finer effect the characters of victims, always interesting, especially when relieved by intervals of energy. On the stage, the part of the hammer is usually preferred to that of the anvil . . . but the anvil has the advantage when it rebounds against the hammer! . . . And does not this happen on the stage of real

life as well as on the mimic scene? In this point of view the character of *Dorsan* is admirable. It is imbued with dignity, energy, generosity, and tenderness of feeling. Such is the husband of the *Jealous Wife*. This character was one of my dreams. How I wished to have performed it. And yet I felt fully conscious that I could not have given it any thing like the effect which was conferred on it by Granger.

The Comédie Italienne was already bearing fruits which we viewed with envy. The plays produced there were quite as good as ours, and indeed, but for the miracle of “*Figaro*,” the Italian Theatre would have eclipsed us in the year 1785. “*Tom Jones*,” “*Cephise*,” and “*La Femme Jalouse*,” were three admirable comedies. Nor was there any lack of good performers. Madame Verteuil, Rosières, and Granger, were all excellent. The Comédie Italienne was nightly thronged by overflowing audiences, and began to be a formidable rival to her elder sister, the Comédie Française.

The talent of Granger was, in itself, a host of attraction. In the year 1784, this actor, after having been on a tour through the provinces, made his appearance at the Théâtre Italienne. His merit was speedily appreciated. He became a public favourite, and the dramatic authors of the day vied

with each other in writing characters for him. “L’Habitant de la Guadeloupe,” and the very original part in “La Brouette du Vinaigrier,” owe their existence to his talent. Though not a handsome man, his figure and action were distinguished by grace and elegance. There was a captivating charm in the tone of his voice, and the style of his diction; and his acting was always remarkable for unaffected ease and perfect fidelity to nature. Like myself, he at first entered upon the *petit-maitre* line of characters; and certainly excelled in the portraiture of the gay and volatile man of fashion. In speaking thus highly of Granger, I may perhaps expose myself to the charge of vanity, since he and I were frequently compared with each other; and now, without any affectation of modesty, I will frankly draw my parallel. Granger far surpassed me in elegance, but I think I excelled him in humour. He could address a woman better than I; but, on the other hand, I could address a man better than he. I could not deliver a love couplet with his seductive grace; nor could he utter an epigram with my satirical force.

One morning, very early, I was surprised by the receipt of a note from the Chevalier de Boufflers, requesting that I would call on him immediately, as he had something of importance to communicate to me. He merely hinted that the matter in

question was a secret, and related to an act of service which it was in my power to render him. The vague terms in which the note was couched, and the place whence it was dated, puzzled me, and whilst I dressed myself, I was bewildered in a maze of conjectures. I was aware that the chevalier had got involved in an adventure which, at its commencement, had threatened unpleasant consequences; but he had apparently, with admirable tact, succeeded in extricating himself from the difficulty. Still, possibly, thought I, the affair may not yet be settled; and as I had heard nothing about it from the mouth of the chevalier himself, I gave full scope to my imagination.

The chevalier cherished a sincere friendship for me, and I was gratefully attached to him. He presented, in his own person, the singular union of the churchman, the soldier, the man of letters, the man of gallantry, and, above all, the man of wit¹. His manners were distinguished by the polished grace of the courtier, divested of any trace of pride and formality.

¹ The Chevalier de Boufflers wore the *petit-collet* only a few months; but he was an abbé. The mere tonsure, which implied no positive vow, was to men of family a means of succeeding to rich benefices. This operation being once performed, the military character was assumed under the title of Knight of Malta. Such was, for a considerable time, the position of the Chevalier de

On my arrival at Raincy, the chevalier received me with a hearty welcome, thanked me for my punctuality, and immediately proceeded to explain his reason for having sent for me.

"No doubt," said he, "you were surprised at the mysterious nature of my message; but perhaps you would not have come, had I informed you what I want you to do. To make short of the matter, will you be my substitute this evening?"

"Your substitute, colonel? How¹?"

"Don't be alarmed. It is only for a reading . . . a literary . . . a dramatic reading. In short, four acts, which I am anxious to recommend to the good grace of the Duke of Orleans."

"But colonel," said I, "I am no reader. I cannot read with effect, . . . and, least of all, in the presence of the Duke of Orleans."

"Oh! as to that," said the chevalier,
"reading before a Duke of Orleans is just the same as reading before any one else. I have seen you *act* very well before the King of France."

"But," said I, "reading and acting are very

Boufflers, who was very far from considering himself bound by any vow that might hinder his participation in any of the gay amusements of Paris.

¹ It was customary to address the chevalier by the title of colonel, a rank which Louis XVI., after considerable hesitation, had granted him.

different things! . . . I assure you, chevalier, you will do better to send for Prévile, or somebody else. . . . Reading, dramatic reading especially, is a very difficult art. It requires practice, and a peculiar tact. . . . Only imagine! . . . Your audience is close upon you. . . . There is no illusion . . . no costume . . . no scenery! On the stage, a performer has but one character to sustain; but in reading a play he has five or six. . . . He must speak in the different tones of voice suited to the young, the old, the mild, the choleric, the passive, and the impatient. He must assume different airs and manners, represent both sexes, and all ages! . . . And this, too, at the distance of two or three feet from the spectators, standing behind a table, between two wax candles! . . . The very thought of it terrifies me!"

"No matter, Fleury," said the chevalier, "you cannot make me believe that you are so easily terrified. . . . You really must read this play. It will be obliging me, and possibly may be of advantage to yourself. The fact is, I have succeeded in securing this favour to you in preference to Molé, who was proposed, when I declined reading, for which I had my reasons."

One of which reasons was, as I afterwards learned, the expected presence of M. Suard, who had recently written a satirical quatrain on the

chevalier. The latter, who was just at that time aspiring to the honour of an academic chair, deemed it prudent not to reply to M. Suard, who was already one of the *immortals*. It happened, that on the evening preceding that fixed upon for reading the play to the Duke of Orleans, it was mentioned that M. Suard would be present. The chevalier was afraid that his well-known talent, as a dramatic reader, might procure him an overwhelming share of applause and approbation, which would provoke the sarcastic humour of the academician.

“If M. Suard should indulge in any of his cutting remarks,” said the chevalier, “I might be tempted to retort, and so lose my chance of the Academy. . . . Therefore, my dear Fleury, you see how desirable it is that you should read for me.”

This, added to some other reasons adduced by the chevalier, caused me eventually to consent to his proposition. There was, it is true, a personal reason, which had no little share in influencing my decision. I had been let into the secret, that the play in question was from the pen of the Countess de Montesson, and destined for the Comédie Française. I was anxious to be enabled to judge of the literary talents of the lady, and, to

confess the truth, my vanity was somewhat flattered by the confidence reposed in me.

I was presented in the course of the day, and experienced the most favourable reception. The affable and easy manners of the Duke of Orleans have often been the subject of eulogy. Madame de Montesson was distinguished for unaffected grace, combined with a captivating air of delicate frankness. I was much accustomed to the society of authors; and I have seen the worst-tempered and captious among them assume an air of urbanity, and overwhelm with flattery the actor who was to embody their dramatic creations. But this lady, to her praise be it spoken, was not one of that class; her reception of me was characterized merely by the amiability of a well-bred woman. I beheld in *her* the graceful and affable Madame de Montesson, and not the timid authoress of the "*Comtesse de Chazelles*."

The apartment chosen for the reading of the play, was a sort of library, very simply furnished. On the walls, which were of a plain colour, were hung some maps and engravings, and one painting. Two statues, representing Friendship and Beneficence, stood at one end of the room. Chairs without arms for the auditors, a small sofa for the Duke of Orleans, two arm-chairs (one allotted

to me), a table, and a reading-desk; such were the only articles of furniture in the apartment, which presented the modest aspect of a literary man's study¹.

The piece, which it was now my task to read, was not the first literary production of Madame de Montesson. She had already written several little dramas, which were performed at the theatre of Raincy, and in which Monseigneur himself frequently sustained a character. That these pieces were admired and applauded may naturally be supposed; but it is only just to add, that they afforded evidence of considerable talent, and when in verse, the flowing neatness of the versification was remarkable.

In the literary world, Madame de Montesson was looked upon as a phenomenon alike singular and interesting. Astonishment was naturally excited by the productions of a lady who had attained the mature age of forty before she had even bestowed a thought on the rules of French poetry, and whose first essays consisted of lengthened

¹ M. Fleury's notions of the "aspect of a literary man's study" seem rather wild—two statues, a few prints, one painting, and some chairs and tables. The description brings to my mind the "picture gallery" at Chanteloupe, a splendid apartment, on the walls of which I saw hanging half-a-dozen common Parisian caricature prints.—ED.

poems, comedies, and tragedies, all the creations of her own unassisted talent. The public, who could not rightly comprehend the sort of private fame enjoyed by Madame de Montesson, impatiently looked for the performance of one of her plays before the grand tribunal of dramatic judgment.

My reading was crowned with approbation. The piece ("La Comtesse de Chazelles") appeared to me to contain many effective points, and was imbued throughout with the graceful and sensitive feeling which characterized the mind of its accomplished authoress. But nevertheless I feared that a piece written, as it evidently was, without any stage experience, might be better calculated for reading than for representation. In reading, good dialogue, that is to say, short interlocution, produces but little effect, whilst the long tirade, by affording opportunity for poetic development, is proportionably impressive. On the stage, the rule is precisely reversed. Still I could not venture to form a decided opinion from this first reading; and besides, I thought it possible that the fifth act, which was not then completed, might impart to the piece that degree of action which it still appeared to want.

Madame de Montesson explained her plan with reference to the fifth act. The company rose

from their seats, and, walking up and down the apartment, commented on the production. Each individual present gave his or her opinion, and M. Suard, who was, as the Chevalier Boufflers had expected, one of the *petit comité*, traced out a fifth act, which he recommended to Madame de Montesson for adoption.

“My dear M. Suard,” said the lady, “I cannot, in conscience, accept your kind offer. To borrow one act out of five, would be encroaching too much on the bounty of a friend.”

“Yes,” said the Duke of Orleans, “and it would be boldly asserted, that Madame de Montesson’s plays are no more her own than the Abbé Roquette’s sermons are his¹.”

“It is strange,” returned Madame de Montesson, “that my enemies have pardoned all my good fortune, but they will not forgive my vanity.”

“That is perfectly natural,” observed the duke; “can anything be more likely to provoke the malignity of your enemies. It is the vanity of one, setting itself up in opposition to the vanity of all. . . . *Diantre!* We will subdue the league,—we shall see the piece performed at the Comédie Française.”

¹ The Abbé Roquette was notorious for preaching, and passing off as his own, sermons, in the composition of which he had little or no share.

This prediction was verified. Precisely a year after this, the "*Comtesse de Chazelles*" was announced at the *Comédie Française*, and all the world of fashion was on the tip-toe of curiosity. The rehearsals were private, and so much mystery was maintained, that it was even a subject of conjecture whether the piece was the production of a male or female writer. Report assigned it alternately to the Marquis de Montesquiou, to M. de Segur, to Madame de Montesson, to the Countess de Balby, and even to Monsieur, the king's brother. It was not until the eve of the eventful night fixed for the performance, that the riddle was solved.

Those who have read Jean Jacques' description of the performance of the first symphony of his composition, may form an idea of the effect produced by the "*Comtesse de Chazelles*." I never in my life witnessed such a scene of disorder. The sex of the author, the peculiar position of Madame de Montesson, the respect which might naturally have been inspired by the sacred nature of her union with the Duke of Orleans, the reputation which her talents had acquired in the high circle in which they were known,—all were insufficient to conciliate favour. It must be observed too, that on that evening, the court circle was not the smallest portion of the audience.

A spirit of unjust hostility was manifested from the very opening of the piece, and it was evident from the severity with which even the first scene was judged, that Madame de Montesson's claims to literary talent gave greater umbrage to her enemies, than the rank to which she had been elevated by fortune and the choice of the first prince of the blood. I recollected the remark of the Duke of Orleans respecting the league, and I thought it fully verified. It was indeed the vanity of all, leagued against the modest pretensions of one. There is little doubt that the play would have been well received by a more fastidious, but less prejudiced audience. The subject was taken partly from "*Les Liaisons Dangereuses*" of Laclos, and partly from Richardson's "*Clarissa*;" the plot therefore could not be devoid of interest. The characters were, it is true, infinitely inferior to those which had served as their models; but nevertheless, the easy and elegantly flowing dialogue, together with some well-directed traits of satirical humour, would infallibly have won admiration, had the piece obtained a fair hearing. In the portraiture of society and manners it was probably imperfect, but considering Madame de Montesson's position, the wonder would have been, had her pictures of life been accurate. In courts, human nature is never to be seen without disguise,

and when princes and princesses attempt to sketch portraits from life, they find their models all in masquerade ; they may produce pleasing pictures, but not correct likenesses. To have expected genuine comedy from the pen of Madame de Montesson, would have been to look for an impossibility. To those who cherished such an expectation, Madame de Montesson might have replied in the words of young Marmontel, when Voltaire advised him to draw comic characters : “ You recommend me to make copies, forgetting that I have never seen the originals.”

However, the Duke of Orleans had perfect faith in the fidelity of the portraits drawn by his illustrious partner, and counted with full confidence on the success of the play. On the eventful night of its first performance, he betrayed infinitely more of the uneasy feeling of authorship than Madame de Montesson herself. He awaited the result with a degree of nervous anxiety, which would scarcely have been felt by a man whose fame and fortune might have depended on it. At one time he had resolved not to be present at the performance, but to remain with Madame de Montesson at Raincy ; his anxiety, however, when the time arrived, would not permit him to stay there. He came to Paris, but without going to the theatre, where his feelings would have been exposed to a

severe trial. He received information every moment of all that was going on ; couriers and porters were kept running to and fro, bearing tidings unfortunately not the most gratifying. Notes written by persons stationed for that purpose at the principal entrances, intimated to the duke the disposition of the audience as the play proceeded : “ They are laughing ! ” — “ they are yawning ! ” were at first the laconic announcements ; but by degrees the storm gathered, till at length it burst with fearful fury, and the “ Comtesse de Chazelles ” died a violent death.

After the play, the condemnation of which, as I have already said, was the result of a powerful cabal, the Duke of Orleans received the visits of the few friends who had been let into the secret of Madame de Montesson being the author of the play. It was suggested that the piece should have the trial of a second performance, after some corrections and alterations, which it was believed would secure its success.

On the following day Madame de Montesson arrived from Raincy, and on being made acquainted with the unfortunate fate of her play, formed a resolution which reflected great credit on her feelings. Unlike many unsuccessful dramatists, who eagerly screen themselves behind an *incognito*, and sometimes scruple not to avert

public suspicion from themselves by fixing it on others, that high-minded lady determined to acknowledge herself the authoress of the fallen play. "Had it succeeded," said she, "I should not have avowed the authorship; but since it has failed, I will not suffer it to be assigned to anybody except myself."

At the urgent entreaties of the Duke of Orleans, who was bent on appealing against this first sentence of condemnation, Madame de Montesson directed her attention to the alterations which had been suggested to her. At length the bills announced the second performance, which however was postponed on account of the death of the Duke de Choiseul. Availing herself of this delay, Madame de Montesson wished to try a second reading of the piece. Another committee of judges was summoned: they consisted of men who were distinguished as patrons of the drama, who constantly attended first performances, and were looked up to as the guides of public taste, and were not without their influence in the great world. Among them were the Marquis de Montesquiou, the Duke de Duras, the Count de Bissy, and M. de Suard, who, as I have stated, was present at the first reading.

Opinions were divided, and it was alleged that Madame de Montesson concurred with those who

were for the withdrawal of the piece, but that was not precisely the fact. This final resolution was not adopted until the lapse of several days after the discussions on the second reading; and it was prompted by the following circumstance.

Among the boxes, whose occupants were most fervent in their applause of the "*Comtesse de Chazelles*," one was conspicuous above all the rest. In spite of murmurs, shouts of disapproval, and even hisses, the group of gentlemen who occupied the box above alluded to, kept up an incessant round of clapping. They were friends of *Madame de Montesson*, and consequently their enthusiasm was not surprising to those who knew from whose pen the play had emanated. But the treachery of these apparently zealous friends would have been amusing, were it not that treachery is always odious, but most especially so when it assumes the guise of friendship.

The gentlemen, who attracted general attention by vehemently clapping and beating their hands on the front of the box, had adopted the singular and original scheme of placing under their feet those whistles used by gamekeepers to decoy birds, such as quails, pheasants, partridges, &c. Thus, whilst their hands were employed in applauding, their feet were engaged in sounding the

shrillest notes of discord and disapproval. This treachery was brought to light by the box-keeper, who, in support of her testimony, produced one of the whistles which had been left behind. The Duke of Orleans and Madame de Montesson therefore resolved not to expose the play to a second trial, as there was little doubt that the same dishonourable stratagems would again be resorted to for the purpose of condemning it.

One of the persons who had been guilty of this disgraceful conduct, was indebted to the Duke of Orleans for rapid advancement in the world; and the two others had been frequently received and entertained by his royal highness with that cordial hospitality for which he was so distinguished. The Duke was naturally incensed at this baseness; but when his first feeling of indignation had passed away, he suspended the whistle to a ribbon, and hung it up in Madame de Montesson's cabinet, between the statues of Friendship and Beneficence. Whenever the lady launched forth too warmly in praise of a friend, or expressed an inclination to become again a candidate for literary honours, the Duke would sound the whistle, and Madame de Montesson immediately recollected the cruel lesson she had received.

This cabal was nicknamed the partridge conspiracy; and for a long time afterwards, when

the success of a new play was doubtful, it was not uncommon in the theatrical and literary circles, to hear apprehension expressed lest it might fall a victim to the *conspiration des per-drix* ¹.

¹ It seems, by this mention of the statues of Friendship and Beneficence, that the original reading took place in the *cabinet* of Madame de Montesson, so strangely described by M. Fleury as “exhibiting the modest aspect of a literary man’s study.” It seems that Madame de Montesson had paid quite dearly enough for *her* whistle,—Ed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Theatrical retirements.—Preville, Brizard, Madame Preville, and Mademoiselle Fanier.—Actors of Molière's school.—Social intercourse between actors and persons of rank.—The Prince de Condé's theatre.—Honours rendered to Preville and his wife.—Brizard.—His charity.—His expedient for the relief of the poor.—Rousseau at Ermenouville.—The colony of *Sabotiers*.—The contraband snuff.—Preville's benevolent device.

I RECOLLECT having heard Florence say, in allusion to the retirement of Mouvel, that when our old actors left the stage, they carried their fame along with them, and that then, among their colleagues whom they left behind, units were magnified into decimals. Florence now found himself in a very fortunate position. By the retirement of Preville and Brizard, he was magnified into a double decimal.

Both had arrived at that period of life when an actor's physical powers become inadequate to give

a vivid embodiment to his conceptions. Preville, the Molière of the comic scene; Brizard, the powerful representative of the elder characters of tragedy and serious comedy; the elegant and dignified Madame Preville; and the lively, sparkling Mademoiselle Fanier—all bade us adieu. These were mournful events to the Comédie Française, and not less mournful to the public.

We conceived the happy thought (if I may venture to say that any thing could be happy under such circumstances) of making one farewell night for all the four eminent performers above named; and on that night each sustained a favourite character. First, Brizard appeared in *Horatio*, his finest character, and truly surpassed himself. Never, perhaps, did he evince so much energy, though it evidently forsook him when he repeated the line—

“Moi-même en vous quittant j’ai les larmes aux yeux.”

Here the eyes of the old Roman were suffused with tears, and the pit responded to his grief.

In Brizard the public lost an actor endowed with exquisite talent for comedy, whilst he frequently rose to sublimity in tragedy. His first and rarest merit, and that for which he was indebted to nature, was quick and ardent feeling. His equal success in tragedy and comedy, was in

a great measure due to the varying expression of his fine countenance, and to his happy art in modulating his voice. The rude courage of old *Horatio*; the pride and sensibility of *Diego*; the dignity and energy of *Zopire*; the generous spirit of *Alvarez*; the deep grief and heart-moving madness of *Lear*; the dignity and eloquence of the father in the “*Menteur* ;” the gascon humour, the *bonhomie* and the chivalrous air of *Henri IV.*; all these diversified shades of character were portrayed by Brizard with a degree of force and nature which perfectly charmed his audiences.

The following little anecdote will convey some idea of the admirable way in which he acted the part of *Henry IV.* After a performance of the “*Partie de Chasse*,” at Fontainebleau, where Brizard played the part of the great monarch, he had the honour of lighting the king and queen on their departure from the theatre.

“*Monsieur Brizard*,” said *Marie-Antoinette*, “you have played your part to-night so well that you have made a conversion.”

“*Yes* ;” said the King, more emphatically than he was accustomed to speak, “you have almost made *me* like sovereignty.”

In the “*Partie de Chasse*” we showed the public all the losses we were doomed to sustain in one night. Brizard, Preville, Fanier, and Madame

Preville, the brightest stars of the old Comédie Française. Not that I mean to deny the excellence of the talent which has risen up since that time; only the latter are quite a new race of actors; while the former were the remains of the generation of Molière. Preville and Brizard were the contemporaries of Baron. They seemed even as if they had been closely related to the father of the French drama; so much so, that we not unfrequently termed them *la famille Molière*.

Preville and his wife retired to a beautiful little estate near Senlis, which they had purchased with their savings. There they enjoyed the friendship of the Prince de Condé, who was a distinguished patron of the drama, and himself a tolerably good amateur actor. They were received at Chantilly, and their society was sought by many noble families, whose chateaux were in the neighbourhood.

Since that time a great change has taken place in manners, and the usages of society are totally different. With reference to the high associations enjoyed by Preville and his wife after their retirement, it may not be out of place to notice the position maintained by actors at that time in their intercourse with the nobility.

Some, and these were in the minority, were invited into company for the same reason as amusing

men of all classes are invited; to contribute to the entertainment of the company. Their patrons might have said to them what Molière used to say to Lulli: "*Allons ! Baptiste, fais nous rire.*" Musson, who was a sort of buffoon, was at the head of this class of actors. He and his disciples always carried about with them their budget of jests, bon-mots, and repartees, all seasoned to the very highest flavour. These were their claims to admission. But the Comédie Française did not supply merry-andrews ¹.

Another set of actors, the young and gay, were the intimate associates of all the brilliant courtiers who fluttered about our *coulisses*. They were

¹ Volange, who belonged to one of the minor theatres, disliked to exhibit himself in this way. One evening, when he was at a party at the house of a nobleman, he was given to understand that he had been invited only to amuse the company, and that they looked for some drolleries similar to those which excited so much risibility in his favourite character of *Jeannot*. He politely excused himself; but he was reminded that it was *Jeannot* who had been invited. "Very well," said he, "since Monseigneur has thought proper to invite *Jeannot*, M. Volange will wish him good evening." So saying he took his departure. An English story, of a similar nature, is told of the well-known Lord Kelly, and Fischer, the celebrated performer on the oboe. He was invited to sup with his lordship, and went. In the course of the evening Lord Kelly hinted, that he hoped he had brought his oboe with him. "My lord," said Fischer, "my oboe never eats suppers." —ED.

young men of wit and talent, and not having sufficient experience to know their proper position, relatively to their superiors, made themselves intimate with their noble friends, entered into all their intrigues, became their rivals in love affairs, were rivalled by them in turn, and without being precisely their companions, on equal terms, were their confederates in profligacy. There were many actors of this class among the members of the *Comédie Française*. The dinner or sporting parties of young men of rank, always included several of our fashionable young actors. This was the established custom of the time. The theatre was a school of elegance for young noblemen, and the houses of young noblemen were schools of study for young actors.

But when a performer's talents began to be matured, and he found his reputation rising, he soon understood his own position, and valued himself accordingly. Actors then accepted the invitations of persons of quality, because they felt confident of experiencing the reception which talent and genius should always secure to their possessors. They did not consider themselves favoured by the notice of the great. A gentleman may, if he chooses, be a gentleman, and nothing more: birth and fortune will always secure to him the consideration of society. But an actor, a

painter, a musician, or an author, must rely for distinction on his own intrinsic merits. In those noble chateaux, whose owners loved to draw distinctions between the ranks and professions of their guests, if an actor was not thought worthy of a seat at the top of the table, he at least was not thrust to the bottom.

I will just mention how Preville was treated at the residence, or, I may say, the court of the Prince of Condé. In the prince's private theatre there was a box reserved for the great actor and his wife, in the situation corresponding with the king's box in other theatres, bearing over it the inscription : "*Loge de Monsieur et Madame Preville.*" They alone were admitted to it, and whenever they attended the theatre, the greatest honours were shown to them ; indeed, they even received what was termed in the theatrical phraseology of the day, *les honneurs du roi*.

As this phrase refers to a long-exploded custom, it may require explanation. At Fontainebleau, at Versailles, and at the Petit-Trianon, it was the practice, at the conclusion of the play, for the performers to range themselves in a line, and make their *obeissance* to the audience. After this ceremony they approached the king's box, and, without bowing a second time, stood in an attitude of the most profound respect, until the curtain

dropped. One evening, at the Prince de Condé's private theatre, the Prince performed *Michau*, and the other characters in the piece were filled by noblemen and ladies of exalted rank. These noble actors and actresses, at the moment when the curtain was about to fall, advanced to Preville's box, the Prince de Condé at their head, and Preville and his wife received *les honneurs de la loge du roi*.

Brizard, after his retirement from the stage, continued to reside in Paris. His private worth was no way inferior to his professional talent. Though his fortune was not considerable, his generosity and charity were unbounded. At length, finding that the demands made upon his bounty were greater than his means enabled him to comply with, he adopted the following expedient for raising money to supply the wants of his needy pensioners.

During his long engagement at the Comédie Française, he had gradually collected an excellent library. After his retirement, he used to fill up a great portion of his leisure in painting, an art in which he excelled¹; but in addition to this he felt desirous of exercising some mechanical occupation. Accordingly he learned book-binding, intending to put his library in order, and clothe his books in neat array. Whilst thus employed, it struck him that the money he was saving by binding his

¹ Brizard was a distinguished pupil of Vanloo.

own books, instead of employing a book-binder, would form a good fund for charitable distribution. He put his idea into execution, and every Saturday regularly and punctually calculated the wages due for his work, paying himself, as it were, with one hand, and with the other giving the amount to the poor. He continued his labours, and after a little time found that he could afford to make his bindings more costly, and pay himself higher prices. He procured more splendid and expensive materials, and ascertained the wages that were paid to the best workmen in *his* line. He did not reduce his wages: on the contrary, he paid himself at a most liberal rate, and after a considerable interval of time employed in this way, found himself possessed of a library of superbly-bound books. Though highly gratified by this acquisition, he derived a still greater satisfaction from reflecting on the benefits which its creation had enabled him to confer.

It is good to give, but it is equally good to know how to give with delicacy and discretion. Our two retired comrades were remarkable, not only for their charity, but for their judicious dispensation of it. I cannot take leave of Preville (though it is possible I may again introduce him to the reader) without relating a little trait, which forms a pendant to the above anecdote of Brizard.

The determined resolution with which Rousseau refused to receive pecuniary aid is well known. He preferred living on the produce of his literary exertions, and would even have laboured with his hands rather than accept favours from friends (in whose sincerity he unfortunately no longer had faith), or to become the pensioner of the great, whom he supposed would regard him as their slave¹.

At Ermenouville he accepted a retreat. He was reduced to great poverty, and in consequence of his determination to receive from M. de Girardin nothing beyond hospitality, he continued in poverty during the four months which he passed at Ermenouville, previously to his death.

Preville knew Jean-Jacques when he was younger, and less susceptible—before he fell a victim to that morbid melancholy which made such havoc on his mind. They were in the frequent habit of meeting each other, in the houses of some mutual acquaintances; and long before the writings of the philosopher had become popular, and whilst the talents of the great actor were yet in embryo, our comrade succeeded in making Jean Jacques now and then accept an admission to the *Comédie Française*.

Subsequently they lost sight of each other. The

¹ The correspondence, part of which is still unpublished, between Rousseau and David Hume, does not give one this idea.—ED.

morose temper of Rousseau did not accord with the gaiety and good humour of the comedian ; but the latter, happening to visit Ermenouville, they met, and their acquaintance was renewed.

After staying a short time in the little cottage which Rousseau occupied in the vicinity of the chateau, Jean-Jacques proposed that they should take a turn. " Let us go out," said he ; " it is only in the open air that I feel at home." When once abroad, the philosopher became more lively and good humoured. He walked round the park with Preville, calling his attention to its beauties, and describing every remarkable spot, evidently taking pleasure in entering into the descriptions.

After walking for about the space of an hour, they separated. Rousseau directed his course to the chateau, but Preville loitered about the park. During the promenade, Preville had once or twice felt a wish to take a view of one particular part of the forest, and Rousseau, without making any remark, led him away in a different direction, and apparently sought to divert his attention from the spot alluded to. There was evidently some mystery about this, and Preville resolved to discover what it was. As soon as Rousseau was fairly out of sight, Preville proceeded towards the forbidden spot, and entering the forest, was speedily concealed from observation. After three quarters of an

hour spent in groping his way through the thickets Rousseau's terrestrial paradise burst upon the eyes of Preville.

In the thickest and most secluded part of the forest, M. Girardin had permitted a little colony of poor and industrious people to fix their abodes. With branches of trees, dried leaves, and thatch, they had constructed a little village, which, to the romantic eye of Rousseau, presented a most captivating picture of primitive wildness. These poor people earned their subsistence by making *sabots* (peasants' wooden shoes), and Jean-Jacques, who used frequently to stroll into the wood to botanize, loved to enter into conversation with them. The *sabotiers* took him to be a sort of herborist or an apothecary, in the employment of the lord of the chateau; and as they were pleased with his simple and amiable manners, they sent their children to assist him in gathering herbs and plants. Rousseau was delighted with his new friends, and he prized them as a miser prizes his treasure. He feared lest any human being besides himself should gain access to them; and dreaded, above all things, the encroachment of civilization. In order to keep them permanently secluded in their rustic retreat, he fell on an expedient quite à la Jean-Jacques.

The poor colonists of the forest never visited the neighbouring village, but for the purpose of selling

their *sabots*, hearing mass, or buying snuff: in the latter article three of the community were great epicures. Rousseau observed that they sold their *sabots* only once a month, and that they would not unfrequently have forgotten to attend mass, but for the necessity of laying in a stock of snuff. Accordingly he adopted the device of offering them presents of little packets of snuff, under pretext of making some return for the herbs and plants gathered for him by the children.

But the expense thus incurred was sometimes more than he could afford, and he observed, not without considerable mortification, that his *protégés* had not always patience to await his coming, but when they had exhausted their stock of snuff, they went to purchase more. In the course of a little time the *sabotiers* understood his peculiarity of temper, and from a feeling of delicacy to their new friend, refrained from taking any snuff in his presence, except what he gave them; and when they heard the sound of Rousseau's cane, which he was in the habit of tapping against the large trees, as he approached the hut, they made a signal one to another, which by mutual understanding signified, "Hide your snuff-boxes."

Preville having found his way to the *sabotiers*, entered into conversation with them. Rousseau being mentioned, the poor people spoke of their

kind-hearted friend in terms of the warmest gratitude, and having related the history of the packets of snuff, thus furnished him with a plan of conspiracy. He begged to be directed to the snuff-shop in the village; and having proceeded thither, he concluded a secret compact with the shop-keeper, by which it was agreed that Jean-Jacques should be supplied with all the snuff he wanted, at a reduction of two-thirds below the regular price, under the pretext of its being smuggled; Preville engaging to pay the balance into the hands of the snuff-dealer.

This being agreed upon, an advance of fifty francs was paid. Preville feared that the delicate susceptibilities of the misanthrope would not reconcile itself to the purchase of contraband goods, but when he presented himself at the shop, the snuff-dealer told him some plausible story, which had the effect of easing his conscience, and by this stratagem Jean-Jacques enjoyed the pleasure of supplying the *sabotiers* with snuff till the end of his days.

Brizard's book-binding and Preville's snuff may perhaps excite a smile of contempt in some of my readers; but the finest feelings of the heart are frequently indicated by the most trifling actions. The sum of benevolence, like that of happiness, is made up of trifles.

CHAPTER XIX.

Mercier the dramatist.—The modern Luther.—Misunderstanding between Mercier and the Théâtre Français.—A projected new play.—Character allotted to me.—New disclosures relative to the murder of Winckelmann.—Hints to Mercier on the treatment of the subject.—Eccentric tastes of Mercier.—His likings and antipathies.—He considered himself the inventor of poetic prose.—Mercier's vote on the king's trial.—His address to the National Convention.—His dramatic productions.—Sheridan's *School for Scandal*.—Re-establishment of lotteries.—Witty repartees.—The *Tableau de Paris* prohibited.—The author surrenders himself.—M. Lenoir.—A curious conversation.—Mercier's interview with M. de Rovigo.—His costume on that occasion.—Stormy termination of the interview.—Mercier's dramatic theory.—Aristotle and the hat.—Fertility of Mercier's literary talent.—Various subjects embraced in his writings.

MERCIER had for a long time been in bad odour at the Comédie Française ; he had taken the lead in that famous league of authors, which obliged us actors to make a concession. In a work, written in his peculiar style, Mercier developed his

new ideas on the drama; and the enthusiastic innovator seriously proposed to substitute his own plays for those of the authors whom he wished to exclude from the stage, that is to say, Corneille and Racine. He scrupled not to allege that his plays were more conformable with the great dramatic reformation in which he was ambitious of acting the part of a modern Luther. The performers, however, could not be convinced of the advantage of the bargain, and they sneeringly declined it. Mercier's indignation was roused, and he attacked us in a pamphlet. One of his plays happened to be waiting its turn for performance, we laid it on the shelf, and struck the author's name off our free list. Mercier then resolved that the contest should be decided by law, and he brought the affair before the council. He was always doing something eccentric and original, and he now took it into his head to repair to Strasburgh, where he got himself admitted as an advocate, his intention being to return speedily to Paris, and in person plead his cause against us. In the event of gaining it, which he confidently counted upon, he proposed to break open the gates of the sanctuary, and proudly raise up, on our ruins, the drama of "Natalie."

But never was there a man more irresolute than Mercier, or more readily influenced by accidental

circumstances. Finding himself qualified to practise as an advocate, he thought he might employ his time to better purpose than in litigating against the Comédie Française. He found himself in want of money, and if I recollect rightly, it was about this time that he set to work with his "Tableau de Paris," and conceived the idea of his grand revolution of the globe.

Having these two important occupations on his hands, Mercier left us unmolested; and thenceforth began to earn for himself the reputation which is still attached to his name. Subsequently, when I became acquainted with him, his misunderstanding with the Théâtre Français was entirely at an end.

To me his acquaintance was a source of great pleasure. Originality of talent was not his only distinguishing characteristic. He possessed many excellent qualities of heart. In short, to know him was to love him. Shortly after the commencement of our intimacy, he showed me a mark of attention for which I felt flattered and grateful. He described to me in detail the plot and plan of a play, of which he intended to request a reading at our theatre. In this piece he destined for me a character, which, played in conformity with his views, could not fail of being strikingly effective. It was one of those characters, which I had long

wished to have the opportunity of representing, for I was heartily weary of continually figuring in lovers' parts. I wished to impart to my style originality: a colouring less commonplace than the everlasting "*Je vous aime*" afforded the opportunity of attaining.

Mercier's play of "*Winckelmann*" promised me this chance. I knew not with what degree of talent the author had treated his subject, but the idea in itself struck me as being novel and interesting, and in the mere outline which he presented to me, three fine characters were discernible.

First, there was *Winckelmann* himself, traced with all the spirit, the enthusiasm, and artist-like feeling, which so peculiarly distinguished Molé, for whom the character was destined. Next there was a morose, gloomy old man, haunted by the idea of a parricide—a living personification of remorse—the victim of despair and terror; this character excited regret for the loss of Brizard, who would have given it with so much boldness and breadth of colouring. Finally, there was the part assigned to me; a young and ardent character, a lover it is true, but at the same time a determined gamester, divided between the two passions, or rather blending both into one; a bold energetic character, resembling the *Jeuneval* of the same

author. These three characters vigorously conceived, and finished out in a style equal to their first conception, must infallibly have pleased the public taste ; and at length I should have had the good fortune to meet with one of those creations, which afford an intelligent actor an opportunity of distinguishing himself.

Mercier was fully justified in his confident anticipations of the success of this play, for it unfolded the circumstances which led to the murder of the illustrious Winckelmann. The remembrance of that great antiquarian and his tragical death were not yet obliterated from the public mind, and the interest attached to those recollections, added to the promised disclosure of some new facts, seemed to insure to the play every favourable chance of success. It is therefore matter of astonishment that the piece was never produced, especially as Mercier was a writer, whose facility of execution was equal to his readiness of conception. I expressed to him my astonishment at the abandonment of his design, but his reasons for it I could not ascertain. It is not improbable that the disclosures alluded to were the real causes which prompted Mercier to relinquish his project. The fact is, that the criminal who was condemned to death for that memorable murder, was, according to Mercier's version of the story,

only a hired assassin, and the honour of a respectable family was compromised in this blood-stained mystery.

Mercier first sketched out his play in the form of a romance, which he read to me, and then explained the developments and modifications which he proposed to introduce. I ventured to throw out to him some hints for the construction of the drama.

I thought it probable that the author, in his wish to exhibit the poetic spirit of the great artist, might be betrayed into the mistake of making Winekelmann too prominent a character. He appeared to me, on the contrary, though necessary to the piece, only of secondary importance in the tragic action, the soul-stirring interest of which was independent of him. Mercier had in some degree taken a false view of his subject, and for the sake of carrying out his plan, had departed widely from truth. To show off Winekelmann in the most brilliant light possible, he represented him at Schoenbrunn in an interview with the Emperor Joseph II.; then at Rome face to face with the Pope; and finally, after bringing him from Ancona to the neighbourhood of Vicenza, he transported him from Vienna to Trieste, where the murderer lay in wait for him.

It was not till after some reflection that these

faults became apparent to me, for there was in Mercier's manner of reading and reciting, a charm which had the effect of veiling the defects of his subject. He had a fine, full, and sonorous voice, and his handsome countenance beamed with animation whenever his mind was engrossed by any interesting topic. His language was always forcible and elegant. Mercier appeared to me to present a peculiarity which has been remarked in some other authors ; his speaking was like elegant writing, his writing resembled ordinary speaking.

When Mercier had finished the sketch of his play, which he gave me partly in reading and partly in description, he requested my opinion on it. I gave it in those commendatory terms which the outline and general plan of the piece appeared to me to deserve. But fully aware that Mercier's eloquence and descriptive power had had no little share in creating my first favourable impression, I requested him to allow me a week to consider the subject, so that I might form my opinion after mature reflection. I told him that I considered it my duty not to decide hastily on a subject which so closely concerned his interests as well as my own, and that the compliment he had paid me, in wishing me to be the representative of one of his characters, entitled me to be fastidious.

"Well," said he, "I agree to your proposal ;

and all I have to say is, that if you should be dissatisfied you will be in the wrong."

"I should prefer being satisfied after reflection."

"Be it so," said he; "but I entreat you to set aside all your prejudices. Do not judge me by the model of your poets. My language breathes new accents. Before you can duly estimate my *heureusetés* you must banish all your old theories; I was not bred in the school of your versifiers."

Among the versifiers for whom Mercier entertained such marked contempt, Boileau was his especial antipathy. He could scarcely pardon Corneille and Racine; and yet he admired Molière in spite of his submission to rhyme, because, as he alleged, he set rules at defiance; and he used to cite triumphantly that line in which occurs the well known elision:

"Mais elle bat ses gens, et ne les *paie* point."

"Molière! Molière!" he would frequently exclaim, "he is a bird of a different species from your Racine."

Speaking of birds, reminds me of another of the unaccountable antipathies and likings of Mercier. The nightingale was to him a disagreeable unmusical songstress, skipping and leaping over the gamut without regard to rhythm or melody. "Whenever I hear the nightingale," I

once heard him say in a half-angry manner, "I could almost persuade myself that I am listening to a maker of *serinettes* trying his pipes, and blowing first one and then the other at random." The linnet was his favourite; he called it a poetic warbler. "Why is not the poor little linnet more highly esteemed?" said he. "Her notes are delicious; but she is too modest to obtrude herself on the notice of the world, and therefore is neglected. Her cadences are full of pathos and feeling; like the song of a mother to her child, or of a lover to his mistress. But as to the nightingale, she is a mere mountebank, she is the versifier of the feathered tribe."

Mercier entertained a singular antipathy against painters. "There are," he used to say, "five things which I cordially detest; viz., rhymes, Condillae, painters, nightingales, and M. de Rovigo."

The reasons he assigned for some of these antipathies were comical enough. The following were the grounds of his dislike of pictures and painters: "What do these painters do?" he would often say. "They petrify every object which they attempt to represent. On their canvas the stream has no murmur, the breeze has no breath. Look at that rivulet; the picture represents the height of summer, and yet the water seems to be frozen!

Look at the branches of those trees : they are inflexible ; and let the wind blow as it may, the foliage moves not. Are those figures of marble ? Observe those combatants ! they raise their arms, but they never strike ! The painter paralyses nature : who shall reanimate it ? . . . the poet !” *The poet was Mercier. He styled himself the inventor of poetic prose. Racine and Despréaux having, in his opinion, destroyed poetry, he regarded himself as its predestined saviour and restorer, under the form of poetic prose.*

Mercier had long entertained a visionary forethought of the part, which he and other literary men thought themselves called upon to act in 1789, and which, unfortunately, most of them did act. In the literary circles the revolutionary storm had been for several years slowly gathering, and the author of “*l’An 2240*” wielded his pen as boldly as any one. But in spite of Mercier’s predilection for what were then designated “advanced ideas,” he never lost sight of that moderation, without which the best principles can effect but little good. He was a member of the Convention, and one of those who protested most energetically against the excesses of the time. His courage was rewarded by an imprisonment, which at one period threatened to terminate fatally.

It is curious that the motive of Mercier's vote on the sentence of Louis XVI. has never been recorded in any narrative of the events of the time. Though it is not my intention to judge Mercier's political career, yet I cannot refrain from making the reader acquainted with the views and feelings which actuated him on the above important occasion.

Mercier wished that the life of the King should be spared. He was for imprisonment; and in favour of that imprisonment, he adduced reasons, which, had they been adopted, would have compelled the adversaries of the alleged despot to watch over his life, as a mother would watch over the life of her child. For the preservation of the unfortunate monarch, he sought motives even in the hatred of his enemies.

"Let him be imprisoned," he exclaimed, in his address to the assembly; "let him be imprisoned and vigilantly guarded. As long as he lives, he is our hostage. To his partisans and the coalition he is still king. You arrested Louis XVI. at Varennes, because you feared the consequences of allowing him to depart from France. And why? because you saw the danger of giving such a rallying point to the emigrants, such a support to the foreign armies. To take the life of Louis XVI., would be doing now precisely what you wished so

lately to avoid. You might as well place the King beyond the frontiers, and consign him to the enemy. You would put to death a feeble, timid prisoner, and, if you please so to call him, a political nullity; and you would place the sceptre in the hand of a man distinguished for talent and ambition. Louis will be our prisoner in France, but he is still a monarch to his nobles. He who is now on the frontier, is as yet only a prince of the blood. Do you wish to make a king of him? When you lay Louis' head on the block, you place the crown on the head of the other."

This was good reasoning; but it made no impression on those to whom it was addressed.

There never was a man more remarkable for humane and benevolent feeling than Mercier. His probity, too, was of the purest kind; indeed, he carried that principle almost to a romantic extreme. Of this I had a striking example one day, when we were discussing the merits of his piece, the "*Brouette du Vinaigrier*."

"I feel an incurable pang of remorse on the subject of the hero of the '*Brouette*,'" said he: "I endeavoured to represent him as a model of integrity; yet I found it impossible to make him amass four thousand louis by honest industry and the exercise of his calling. I was therefore obliged to make him lend money at compound interest, in

order that he might obtain his wealth. This is mortifying . . . Well," added he, after a sigh, "it cannot be helped. I must console myself with my 'Habitant de la Guadeloupe;' he *is* an honest man, and I am proud of *him*!"

Mercier had indeed reason to be proud of a work presenting a beautiful picture of integrity traced with exquisite talent. I do not know whether this play tended to improve society in general, but I am sure it helped to improve dramatic authors. The "Habitant de la Guadeloupe" has served as a model for numerous French plays, and I suspect, moreover, that Sheridan took some hints for his "School for Scandal," from Mercier.

In the legislative assembly, Mercier was the steady and persevering advocate of the cause of morality. The spirited opposition he maintained against many measures which his conscience could not approve, was in the highest degree honourable to him. He distinguished himself by his efforts to prevent the restoration of lotteries. He wrote and spoke eloquently against the system, and induced many of his friends to oppose the immoral impost. But subsequently, when the immorality was established by law, Mercier was offered the post of inspector of lottery accounts, and, strange to say, *he accepted* it.

Some scrupulous persons reproached him with

this political palinode ; but Mercier excused himself, by saying that he always thought it allowable to "forage upon the enemy." One day he was met on the Pont Neuf by two friends, (one was M. Auger,) who taunted him for accepting the inspectorship, after having so resolutely anathematized the lottery.

"Parbleu, gentlemen," replied the apostate legislator; "I only sell *Coco*, I do not drink it."

When the "Tableau de Paris" made its appearance, the bold pencilling of the author roused the alarm of the minister of the police, and it was resolved that he should be placed under arrest. But the publication did not bear the author's name, and it was found to be no easy matter to discover him. In this dilemma, an order was issued for the arrest of the bookseller; Mercier then resolved to surrender himself. Accordingly, he proceeded to the bureau of the minister, and said, presenting himself, "You are in search of the author of the 'Tableau de Paris;' I am the person." M. Lenoir, who was not a little surprised at this voluntary surrender, received him very politely. They entered into conversation; and literature, politics, and government were all brought under discussion. The "Tableau de Paris" was forgotten until Mercier revived the sub-

ject by asking M. Lenoir whether he had read the prohibited book.

“Yes,” replied the minister.

“What do you think of it?” said Mercier.

“That its author ought to be sent to the Bastille,” replied M. Lenoir.

“*Diantre!* that is a compliment,” said Mercier.
. . . “Would you advise me to go home and pack up?”

“No,” replied the minister; “not for a state prison. But I would advise you, by way of precaution, to make a little journey . . . an excursion to Switzerland for example. Fly from our severity . . . by that means you will excite interest, and your work will not be the less sought after and read.”

“Well, M. Lenoir,” said Mercier, “under these circumstances I presume government will be good enough to pay my travelling expenses.”

“I can’t say any thing about that.”

“But now,” continued Mercier, “that you *are* in the persecuting mood, can you contrive to provoke a decree of the parliament? Then there would be no difficulty about the matter; and I have long wished to make a journey to Italy.”

M. Lenoir laughed at the idea: the martyr and the persecutor cordially shook hands together, and

made the necessary arrangements for the journey.

But Mercier did not always find men in office quite so accommodating. During the reign of the emperor he had a *tête-à-tête* with M. de Rovigo, which did not terminate quite so amicably as that with M. Lenoir.

With his love of independence, and hatred of tyranny in all its forms, it may easily be conceived that Mercier was not very friendly to the government of Napoleon. His witty and sarcastic manner of expressing himself caused his remarks on the conqueror of Europe to be remembered, and repeated from mouth to mouth in the salons of Paris. In spite of this, the imperial police, though not prone to the failing of indulgence, closed its ears. All was faithfully reported, but the Argus had received orders to wink at Mercier's delinquencies; and the minister's reply was, that everything was excusable in a madman. To aim a blow like this at Mercier's vanity, was a bold stroke even for a minister. The consequence was, that Mercier resented this contemptuous treatment with a torrent of the bitterest sarcasm; in short, he indulged to an excess, which not even his alleged madness could palliate, and it was deemed necessary to take legal cognizance of his conduct.

By way of giving him a last warning, he was summoned to appear before M. de Rovigo. Mercier's revolutionary ideas had not caused him to neglect a strict attention to dress and personal appearance; and on occasions of importance, he carried this attention to the extreme of etiquette. On the day fixed for his audience with the minister of the police, he equipped himself *cap-à-pié* in his very best style. He wore a snuff-coloured coat with large buttons, and a magnificent pair of lace ruffles. His hair was powdered, and dressed in a superb queue, and curls on each side, in the old fashion called *à l'oiseau royale*. He wore a hat, the form of which had not varied since the year 1781. It was a three-cornered cocked-hat, of a size which enabled it to serve as a parasol in fine weather, an umbrella in case of rain, and a sort of state canopy on occasions of ceremony.

Thus arrayed, Mercier presented himself to the minister of the police.

"You are, I presume, the gentleman I expect," said M. de Rovigo, as he entered the apartment.

"I am Sebastian Mercier, one of the most distinguished writers in France."

"And no less distinguished a talker, if I am rightly informed," said M. de Rovigo: "you say smart things, sir."

"Yes; that is an old habit of mine," answered Mercier.

"It is a bad habit, and you must be cured of it."

"Pardon me, sir," said Mercier, coolly; "but before we proceed further, have the goodness to tell me whether our interview is likely to be of long duration. If you mean to keep me long, I will discharge the cabriolet which I left at the door. I have engaged it by the hour."

The Duke de Rovigo rang the bell. Mercier had thrown himself into an arm-chair, and crossing one leg over his knee, he looked as cool and unconcerned as if he had been going to subject the Duke to an examination. Meanwhile, a servant entered to answer the bell, and the minister directed him to pay M. Mercier's cabriolet and discharge it. Any one in Mercier's place would naturally have regarded this order as an ill omen, and might have inferred from it the probability of being removed to a new lodging-place; but no such pusillanimous fear assailed the author of the "Tableau de Paris."

"I hope, sir," said he, "you are not going to pay for my cabriolet? Permit me . . ."

"Don't mention it, sir, I beg," said the Duke; "we have matters of more importance to think about."

"You are extremely obliging," replied Mercier; "but I trust you will permit me to have the

honour of presenting you with a copy of my new system of astronomy, in which I dethrone the Dictator Newton, and annihilate the satellites of Gallileo A perusal of that work will repay you the expense of the cabriolet."

Feeling strongly inclined to burst into a fit of laughter, M. de Rovigo turned aside, under pretence of searching for a paper on his desk; and when he thought his countenance had recovered a sufficient degree of official gravity, he presented to Mercier a report, founded on the following particulars.

At an evening party, given in one of the most fashionable hotels in Paris, Mercier indulged in some very caustic observations on a new *senatus-consultum*. The lady of the house, anxious to break off a dangerous conversation, tried to draw aside the attention of the group who were listening to Mercier, by showing some curiosities which had been given her as new year's gifts; it was then about the beginning of January. Every object was looked at and examined: each one present paid his or her tribute of admiration; but Mercier said not a word. His attention seemed to be wholly engrossed in the contemplation of a little almanack, which, though very elegantly bound, was completely eclipsed by the other costly frivolities.

“Are you looking for your saint’s day, M. Mercier?” inquired the lady of the house.

“No, madam,” was the reply; “I am merely admiring this little almanack. Of all the beautiful objects in your collection, I prize this most highly. On these precious tables is inscribed the day of fate—the day which seals the doom of the great warrior. I feel an indescribable happiness in gazing on these lists of months and weeks! The happy day of his downfall is there marked; I could point my finger to it.”

Nonsense of this kind, adorned with Mercier’s accustomed flowers of rhetoric, furnished the ground-work of the police report. The little paper having been read to an end, the minister said:

“Well, M. Mercier, what have you to say to this?”

“That you are very accurately informed of all that goes on,” said he. “Your spies do not cheat you.”

“And how do you imagine all this is to end, sir?”

“My opinion on that question is not, I presume, a matter of much importance.”

“The misconduct described in this report is one of your least offences,” said the Duke. “You are guilty of many other improprieties with reference to the Emperor.”

"I merely speak of him as my old colleague of the Institute," said Mercier. "Surely a little joking may be tolerated between school-fellows."

"Is it for the sake of attacking the academician that you have applied to his imperial majesty the title of *l'homme-sabre*?" asked the Duke.

"You have been misinformed," answered Mercier: "that is not the right term. I called his imperial majesty *le sabre organisé*. That is quite a different thing. . . . *Organized-sabre*! . . . The term implies at once power and intelligence."

"We are not met here for the purpose of joking, M. Mercier," said the Duke.

"I like joking very much," said Mercier . . . "but I am not now in the humour for it."

"It would seem that you were in the humour for it, when you thought fit to call the senators the *genuflexibles*."

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Mercier. "I used the term 'genuflexibles' in accordance with the same idea which suggested the use of the other term. . . . Power and intelligence naturally inspire adoration. The Israelites were the *genuflexibles* of Sinai."

"*Monsieur! monsieur!*" exclaimed the Duke de Rovigo. ". . . This is going too far. . . . This is violating all decorum!"

"*Monsieur! monsieur!*" replied Mercier, rais-

ing his voice to the same pitch as the Duke's ;
“ what have you to do with decorum ? ”

These words, together with the manner in which they were uttered, irritated the Duke de Rovigo, and, rising from his chair, he paced hastily up and down the apartment. Mercier, whose nerves were ruffled by this motion, rose and walked up and down likewise ; and every time they passed each other, they exchanged looks of anger and defiance. At length Savary's military habits got the better of ministerial formality, and he let fall several very strong expressions, which Mercier smartly retorted ; and the Duke, losing all patience, seized Mercier by the flap of his coat, and uttered a threat relative to Bicetre.

Mercier's anger was now wound up to the highest possible pitch, and, in his turn, seizing the flap of the Duke's coat, he gave utterance to a torrent of the bitterest invective. Never did the general sustain such an assault ; and never did the poet treat Boileau, Condillac, or the nightingales, more severely ; concluding his philippic with the following apostrophe :

“ Send *me* to Bicetre ! . . . Mercier to Bicetre ! . . . Know that I bear a European name ; and that I am not to be kidnapped and locked up like an obscure unknown individual. . . . Send me to Bicetre, indeed ! . . . I defy you ! ”

As he uttered these last words, he had receded as far as the door; then proudly putting on his superb cocked hat, he advanced a few paces, and, drawing up his figure, repeated heroically: "Yes; I defy you!"

The minister was astounded. He suffered the audacious author to depart, and so the matter ended; no further notice being taken of Mercier or his liberties of speech.

This adventure did not induce any moderation in Mercier's conduct, on the contrary, I think he became worse than ever. I recollect on one occasion, when visiting him in his humble apartments in the Rue de Seine, I recommended him to observe greater prudence when speaking of the Emperor:

"After all," observed I, "you must admit that Napoleon has performed some glorious achievements?"

"Well," replied he, "I confess he has; but for all *that* there is no harm in a writer like me, stinging him a little now and then. These conquerors are like carp,—they get too fat if they are let alone; the best remedy for that is to put a few pike among them—it keeps them on the alert."

Though Mercier approved of most of the great political changes brought about by the revolution, yet the description I have already given of his costume may serve to show that he was not quite

so favourable to the revolution in dress which exploded the cocked hat, and substituted the round one in its stead. He had altogether very peculiar ideas on the subject of hats and caps. In one of his works he represents himself as holding a dialogue with a nightcap; and I recollect it was by help of a hat that he explained and exemplified to me his dramatic system.

“M. Mercier,” said I to him, one day, “I am delighted with the idea of your new play. The subject is precisely fitted for the exercise of your talent: but it appears to me that your plan deviates a little from rules.”

“A little! You mortify me. I was in hopes that it might deviate a great deal.”

“Oh!” said I, “I do not mean to say that I am a rigid stickler for rules; but I think your plan might admit of some modifications; I am only afraid of the committee. You know there are some scholars among them; and they will talk of Aristotle.” . . .

“Yes; after the manner of the *Médecin malgré lui*,” said Mercier. “Aristotle indeed! It is time the world had forgotten *him*. He has been the destroyer of poetic fancy. But I have attacked him with the arm of Hercules, in the person of my representative Morellet! Aristotle is no more—I have literally danced on his ashes. . . . Fleury, my friend! . . . Because crutches are good things for

old people, would you have the young take to them? . . . Did you know Carlin?"

"He was my particular friend," replied I.

"Do you remember his little hat?"

"Perfectly."

"And, no doubt, you remember the various uses he made of it. When he screwed up the supple hat in the form of a diadem, and with it encircled the brow of his black mask, could Harlequin have had a better head-dress?"

"Impossible!"

"And what sort of air did it give him?"

"It gave him a bold expression . . . quite a *matamore* look. One could immediately perceive that he was going to sharpen his wooden sword."

"And when, by pulling it over one ear, the diadem was set a little awry on his head . . . how then did Harlequin look?"

"The picture of grace and amiability. . . . It was then evident that he expected Columbine, and was about to make love."

"And when Harlequin was in trouble, how did he assume a piteous aspect?"

"In a moment he drew down the brim of his white beaver over his ears. There was no mistaking the meaning which that act conveyed. Some misfortune had befallen the poor fellow. His black mask seemed to be weeping."

“And when, as if by a sudden impulse, he turned up the sides of his hat, and the pointed brims stood up erect? . . . what then?”

“Why, then Harlequin looked as though he could defy misfortune, and laugh at the frowns of Fate. I could almost fancy I saw written in his countenance the words, ‘What care I!’”

“Well now! you see what could be done with a hat,” said my companion. “You see that even to the immoveable features of a mask, a hat could impart the various expressions of courage, love, grief, grace, and carelessness! Carlin’s flexible hat was an important adjunct to his eloquent gestures: if inclining to the right side, it expressed a passion; if to the left, it painted a sentiment. Wishes, hopes, grief, and joy, were all expressed by the hat—and expressed well and powerfully. And why? . . . because that hat was not subject to the rules of Aristotle!”

This singular explanation affords a tolerably accurate idea of Mercier’s eccentric turn of mind. I am not acquainted with any of his writings except his dramatic works, and in those I know there is a great deal of the harlequin’s hat: a jumble of incidents, forced and natural; useful truths and paradoxical extravagancies; fantastic and eloquent writing; and yet the whole of these incongruous ingredients are blended together with a degree of

unity and harmony which has its attractiveness. Mercier was too ready to produce, and too little inclined to correct. His misfortune was, perhaps, to be gifted with too prolific a genius. There is no path of literature which his talents left untouched. Besides plays, novels, and poems, he wrote on politics, history, philosophy, criticism, law, articles for the journals, academic discourses, &c. It is even alleged, that in addition to all this, he wrote sermons, for which a certain *curé* is said to have paid him fifteen louis-d'or each.

This unfortunate fertility must inevitably have had the effect of enervating Mercier's talent, and consequently many of his works are doomed to oblivion. Nevertheless, I think it may be safely affirmed, that the author of the "Tableau de Paris," and the "Habitant de Guadaloupe," would have been a highly esteemed writer, had he not raised up towering ramparts of volumes between himself and literary renown.

In the following chapter I present to the reader the story on which Mercier founded his play the "Death of Winckelmann." I give it in the exact form in which I received it from the author. Most of the particulars detailed in this story were furnished to Mercier by M. Desorgues, to whom they were narrated at Rome by the celebrated Angelica Kauffmann.

CHAPTER XX.

The Abbé Winckelmann.—His journey from Rome to Berlin.—His early career.—His projected visit to France.—Returns home again.—Singular mistake, leading to a fortunate introduction.—Winckelmann arrives at Verona.—Visits Madame Speroni.—Mysterious occurrence.—Winckelmann's unexpected departure from Verona.—Suspicion of his unsoundness of mind.—Journal kept by M. Cavaceppi.—The Villa Pol . . . o.—Access to the collection of curiosities, prohibited.—Sudden conversion of the Marquis Pol . . . o.—Remarkable example of dissimulation.—The gamester's desperation.—Terrific scene.—Circumstances attending the murder of Winckelmann.—Archangeli the assassin.

IN the year 1768, the celebrated Abbé Winckelmann, who then resided in Rome, determined on visiting Berlin; his object being to make arrangements, with a literary man in that city, for a French translation of his "History of Art." This translation he intended to print at his own expense in Rome.

Winckelmann soon traced out his itinerary, and

made the requisite arrangements for his journey. He took leave of his friends, many of whom he requested to furnish him with directions to any monuments of antiquity, or other objects of curiosity which he might have the opportunity of examining on his way; and having accepted the society of a travelling companion (M. Cavaceppi, a Roman sculptor), he prepared for immediate departure.

In a letter to a friend at Bâle, he announced his proposed journey in the following terms: "I have only time, my dear Michel, to write you a very few lines, to acquaint you with my intended visit to Germany. I propose leaving Rome on the 8th of April, in company with M. Cavaceppi. I hope to meet you next autumn, well and happy."

Winckelmann was cheered by the prospect of once again visiting his native Germany, of seeing his early patrons, and the friends of his youth: he was happy in the thought of exploring several valuable libraries and rich galleries, to which his friends in Rome had directed his attention. It is curious that on setting out on this journey he evinced an almost childish flow of spirits, and spoke, in terms of ecstasy to his companion, of the charming scenery of the countries they had to traverse.

After passing rapidly through Loretto, Bologna,

and Venice, the travellers proceeded to Verona, where Winckelmann proposed sojourning for some time. There was a family residing in that city to whom he felt himself in duty bound to pay a visit. He cherished a feeling of the sincerest gratitude to the head of that family, and especially to his wife. The lady had been Winckelmann's first patroness, and he regarded her as the origin of all his good fortune.

This connexion arose out of a remarkable circumstance in the early life of the great historian of Art. I need offer no apology for relating it here; for a peculiar degree of interest is always attached to the first steps in the career of eminent men. Of all others, they are perhaps exposed to the greatest trials. When we know the starting-point, we can more accurately estimate the lofty flight of genius; and few have earned celebrity amidst so many difficulties as those with which Winckelmann had to struggle at the outset of his career.

In his early life he had been a schoolmaster, and afterwards a village clergyman. His mind was richly stored with the treasures of learning, and he united profound acquirements with a refined taste for art and poetry. That vague feeling of restlessness which so often takes possession of the minds of men reserved for great destinies,

determined him to quit Germany and proceed to Paris.

Stimulated by the spirit of adventure, he set out on foot; his stock of provisions and clothing being packed up in an old portmanteau. He had proceeded on his journey as far as Gelnhausen, near Frankfort, when he began to appreciate the temerity of his enterprise, and the impossibility of its execution; for the difficulties which must at any time have attended it, were then augmented by the war which was raging in that part of Germany. He returned homewards, not a little ashamed of the failure of his expedition, and began to revolve in his mind the means of securing an equivalent to the humble post he had imprudently resigned. The state of his wearing apparel on which he now for the first time looked with a critical eye, seemed ill-calculated to recommend him; but though he could not exchange his threadbare coat for a better one, yet it was at least in his power to effect some little improvement in his appearance, by shaving a beard of three days' growth. This he resolved to do before he proceeded further.

He accordingly approached the bank of a rivulet, although, as he himself observed when describing the incident to Cardinal Albani, the temperature of the water was not quite up at

shaving-heat, yet there was an abundant supply of it. He had opened his razor, and knelt down to bring himself within convenient reach of the water, when he was suddenly startled by loud shrieks from a distance. Looking round in the direction whence the cries proceeded, he saw a carriage driving towards him at full gallop. Two ladies alighted from it, and with an air of terror ran towards Winckelmann, whose amazement riveted him to the spot in the position in which the ladies had seen him; one of whom, forcibly seizing his hand, exclaimed:

“Wretched man! . . . what do you mean to do?”

“To shave myself,” coolly replied Winckelmann, who immediately perceived the mistake which had excited so much alarm.

This answer provoked a hearty fit of laughter on the part of the ladies, who declared, that when they saw him on his knees with the razor in his hand, they never doubted that his intention was to cut his throat. Their alarm being dispelled, they naturally wished to know what had induced a young man, whose manner and appearance were characterized by a superior degree of refinement, to establish his toilette at the edge of the water. The poor traveller simply and modestly related his adventures, and the ill success of his recent journey. The rest was easily understood; and after the elder of the two ladies had insisted

on replenishing the poor student's purse, the younger one (she who had rushed forward to seize his hand) wrote with her pencil a few lines, which she gave him. They were addressed to M. Stollmann, a captain of cavalry in garrison at Ostelburgh, and formed, in fact, a strong letter of recommendation to one who afterward proved a sincere friend to Winckelmann. That day the future antiquary may be said to have set his foot on the first spoke of the wheel of fortune, which speedily raised him to the highest rank in the world of learning and art.

Winckelmann never forgot the act of service rendered to him by the young lady; her kindness was deeply impressed upon his heart. At a subsequent period, fate ordained that this same lady should leave her native country, Germany, and fix her abode in Italy. She became the wife of the senator Ambrosio Speroni, and resided in Verona.

As Winckelmann approached the latter place, in his journey from Rome in 1768, it may naturally be supposed that he looked forward with the most pleasurable anticipation to the happiness of seeing his kind friend. To show our elevated condition to those who have known us in humble circumstances, may be gratifying to pride, but to present oneself in the height of fame and fortune to the friends who first raised us from obscurity,

cannot fail to call up a higher and purer feeling. Gratitude must then supersede every other sentiment, and the heart in the fulness of its feeling says, "Behold your work!"

On Winckelmann's arrival at Verona, the first thing he did was to inquire for the residence of Signor Speroni; he soon found it, but, to his mortification, learned that the family were absent. Their absence, however, was not likely to be of long duration. His early patroness and her daughter had merely gone to accompany the senator as far as the neighbourhood of Vicenza. From thence Signor Speroni was to proceed alone to Dessau, near Berlin, for the purpose of taking possession of some property left him by his wife's aunt. This aunt happened to be the very lady who several years previously had generously filled the purse of the poor wandering artist.

Winckelmann was vexed at not seeing his friend. The disappointment seemed to be a sinister augury for the rest of his journey. But he was resolved to see Signora Speroni, whose return was shortly expected; and in the interval thought he might easily perform a little pilgrimage which he had in contemplation. On his departure from Rome, Cardinal Albani had strongly recommended him to see a unique collection of antiquities, &c. in a villa at a short distance from Verona. He accord-

ingly undertook the excursion, unaccompanied by his fellow-traveller, whom business had called elsewhere.

Shortly after Winckelmann's departure from Verona, Signora Speroni and her daughter arrived. They were delighted at the expectation of receiving their illustrious visitor, and anxiously awaited his return ; but his absence was prolonged.

A week had elapsed, and some degree of anxiety began to be felt. M. Cavaceppi was on the point of starting in quest of Winckelmann, when the latter returned.

He saw his old friend Madame Speroni ; but this meeting, which seemed calculated to excite only joyful emotions, seemed on the contrary to have a depressing effect on him. When in the presence of the lady and her daughter, he gave vent to those sentiments with which his heart was sincerely imbued ; but still it was evident that something extraordinary weighed upon his spirits. Fêtes were given in his honour, and amusements of every kind were prepared for him ; but all without effect. Both mother and daughter remarked the *ennui* of their visitor, but attributed it to the fatigue of his journey, and accordingly exerted their utmost efforts to inspire him with a portion of their cheerfulness. Madame Speroni related to him all the news of her family which she thought

would interest him,—that her pretty daughter Cinthia was about to be married, while Cinthia herself, in whose native Italy the art of dissimulation is not one of the earliest lessons impressed on the female mind, unreservedly talked to Winckelmann of her affection for her lover, and eulogized the excellent qualities which he was distinguished by.

“And yet,” observed her mother, “though he is the most amiable of men, he has not escaped the attacks of calumny. At one time, the tongue of malice was so busy with his character, that my husband entertained serious thoughts of breaking off the match.”

“If he had, I must have died,” exclaimed Cinthia, in a tone of artless sincerity. As she spoke, the colour mounted to her cheeks, and taking up her pencil, she began to sketch the prospect that was visible through the half-closed Venetian blind of the veranda.

“You must have died, indeed,” said Winckelmann in a rallying tone, and at the same time watching, from the place where he sat, the hand of the young lady as it lightly traced some object on which her attention was rivetted. “If I mistake not, lady, your thoughts are at this moment far from being engaged on so gloomy a subject as dying.”

“You think so?” said Madame Speroni, smiling.

“Think! I am certain of it,” said Winckelmann. “I have so accustomed myself to the observance of gestures and movements, that they have become to me a sort of language, in which I can read the feelings of the heart. At this moment Signora Cinthia’s gracefully curved hand, and her light pencil, which seems to caress rather than to trace the lines on the paper, indicate a placid joy—a contemplative happiness of mind . . . Now, Signora, turn your face this way, and let me see whether you are not smiling.”

The young lady turned round, and endeavoured to put on a very serious look.

“You see you are mistaken, Monsieur Winckelmann,” said she.

“Pardon me, lady, I was not mistaken. I am now quite certain I was right . . . In vain you compress your lips, and try to look grave; your eyes still smile . . . But see! her hand trembles . . . some emotion agitates her.”

These last words were addressed to Madame Speroni, who hastily stepped up to the window, at which her daughter was sitting.

“Ah, my friend, you are right;” said she. Cinthia is in a little trepidation, and I’ll tell you why . . . In the first place, you must know that during the absence of the Signor Senator, the young gallant who is paying his court here, is not permitted to visit us . . . But still we cannot help

seeing him, when he thinks proper to pass before our windows, and we chance to be sitting at them . . . Now that happens to be the case at this moment. There he is on horseback, on the piazza . . . and what is more, he has been there long enough for Cinthia to sketch him."

"Signor Winckelmann," said the young lady, advancing to the antiquary with a gravity of manner which was now unaffected; "my father was for some time opposed to our marriage . . . He had been inspired with prejudices. He is now at Dessau . . . Do you think you could see him when you go to Berlin?"

"You wish me to say something favourable of . . .?"

"No; I wish you to say only what you think," interrupted the young lady. "I have heard my mamma say, that in your writings you allege that beauty of features bespeaks purity of mind."

"True," said Winckelmann; "I have made that remark. I am of opinion that virtue is the result of a general harmony of the whole being; but . . ."

"Well, well!" . . . again interrupted the impetuous girl. "I give you leave to say to my father anything you think fit of this person."

Winckelmann looked at the sketch with which the young lady presented him, and starting, ex-

claimed with mingled surprise and alarm : “ Ah ! . . . of this person . . . Is he here ? ”

He turned to the window, and thence perceived a handsome young cavalier, who was making his horse prance gracefully on the piazza, looking up as if he expected a salutation from the window.

Winckelmann looked out, and made a sign to the horseman, who, evidently struck with astonishment, suddenly checked the motion of his horse.

All this passed so rapidly, that, when the two ladies turned from the window, expecting that their friend would explain this unexpected recognition, they found to their astonishment that he was gone. In a few minutes they beheld him on the piazza, exchanging a few words with the horseman, and then they both disappeared.

In the evening, they expected Winckelmann to call and solve the mystery ; but he did not come. Next day they sent to his hotel to inquire for him ; the answer was, that he and his companion M. Cavaceppi had left Verona.

What could be the cause of all this mystery ? . . . Whence arose the melancholy of Wickelmann ? . . . What could have occasioned his emotion ? . . . Had he arrived at that fatal period of his life, when all men of superior talent pay their

debt to fame—when extraordinary mental energy is succeeded by premature intellectual decay? Though painful to entertain this conjecture, it nevertheless seemed to be correct. The suitor of the young Signora called on Madame Speroni, to ask her who the madman was whom she had sent to him. He stated, that when Winckelmann came to him on the piazza, he merely appointed a meeting with him at a certain hour: on repairing to the place of rendezvous, he found him; but all he did was, to appoint a second meeting, which engagement he did not keep.

The ladies were surprised and alarmed by this account, and sent to the hotel to make further inquiries. They learned that Winckelmann, during his stay there, had evinced great eccentricity of conduct; that he was sometimes irascible, and at other times cheerful and good-humoured, but without any apparent reason. He would give orders, and then suddenly revoke them. On first arriving at Verona, he stated that it was his intention to proceed to the Tyrol; he afterwards said he must return to Rome; and finally announced his intention of repairing immediately to Berlin. All this naturally led to the supposition that he was suffering under derangement of mind. That idea explained his strange conduct when he looked at the sketch; and Cinthia and her mother deeply

deplored the calamity which had befallen their valued friend.

Let us now see how far Winckelmann's travelling companion throws light on these circumstances. The following fragment of the journal of M. Cavaceppi was quoted in the Italian publications of the time, in support of the truth of presentiments—those mysterious warnings of Providence, which ought not to be regarded with indifference. It is transcribed here, as an historical testimonial, and is most important as affecting his subsequent conduct at Verona.

“The Abbé Winckelmann and I left Rome on the 10th of March, 1768, with the intention of making a tour in Germany. The principal object of the Abbé's journey was to make the requisite arrangements for a French translation of his ‘History of Art:’ as to me, my object was merely to see new countries and new things.

“We directed our course by the way of Loretto, Bologna, Venice, and Verona: in each of which places we visited every object likely to gratify our tastes, or prove useful to us in our various pursuits.

“We crossed the Alps, and entered the Tyrol. At one time, when we were in a peculiarly wild mountainous district, Winckelmann became suddenly depressed, and said to me, in a tone of melancholy: ‘What a horrible picture!—what terrific

wildness !' Some time afterwards, when we had entered upon the German territory, he surprised me by exclaiming, 'What poor architecture!—look at those horrid pointed roofs!' And he said this, with a peculiar emphasis, and with a tone and manner strongly indicative of his dislike of the objects referred to.

“ At first I thought he was jesting ; but when I found that he was really in earnest, I explained to him that the vast height and wild aspect of the mountains had to my eye an agreeable effect. As to the pyramidal mode of building the roofs of the houses, I observed that it was calculated rather to offend *me*, being an Italian, than offend him, a German. Besides, I remarked, in judging of these things, that it is requisite to take local circumstances into account ; and to consider that, in a climate in which heavy falls of snow are frequent, such roofs are indispensable. I likewise took the liberty of observing, that such excessive fastidiousness was not quite consistent with philosophy like his. With the view of rallying his spirits, I quoted some of the epigrams which Catullus has directed against such fanciful caprices. But all my efforts were vain. He assured me that he should have no ease of mind if he continued to travel, and endeavoured to persuade me to return to Italy.

“ Under these unpleasant circumstances, we arrived at Augsburg, where we stayed but a short time, and then proceeded to Munich. Throughout the whole of the way, my travelling companion continued to torment me by his unaccountable melancholy, so that sometimes I was inclined to believe he was insane.

“ I resorted to every possible expedient, in the hope of rallying his spirits. I talked to him—sometimes jocosely, and sometimes with earnest seriousness. The chorus to all my remonstrances was “*Torniami à Roma.*” (Let us go back to Rome.)

“ At Munich, Winckelmann was received with honours apportioned to his merits. He was presented with an exquisitely engraved antique stone, which he greatly admired and valued. But these marks of distinction had no effect in dispelling the vapours which veiled his mind. He was constantly absorbed in melancholy, and slunk about like a criminal.”

The journal of the Roman sculptor continues in this strain, until the time when, weary of Winckelmann’s entreaties to return to Rome, and the unsatisfactory reasons he assigned for wishing to get back, he separated from his gloomy travelling companion at Vienna.

We will now, for a brief space, retrace our steps, and inquire whether the presentiments of

the great antiquary were the result of delusion of mind—the mere chimeras of an excited imagination, or whether they were founded in fearful reality.

Let us follow the Historian of Art during the four or five days which elapsed after his arrival at Verona, when, it will be recollected, he went on a little excursion, unaccompanied by M. Cavaceppi. That excursion, though apparently unimportant, serves to disclose the mystery of the sudden and fatal change observable in Winckelmann.

Furnished with the requisite directions, Winckelmann experienced no difficulty in finding the villa to which Cardinal Albani had directed his attention. It was situated to the north of Mantua, and was discernible even from the Veronese territory. It stood on the brow of one of those numerous hills which impart an undulatory, rather than a rugged, aspect to the fertile country. Winckelmann was charmed at the first glimpse of the villa: there he expected to see a thousand curious objects, which would augment his store of antiquarian knowledge. The villa Pol . . . o was not one of those neat, trim country residences, in which masses of polished stone seem to be piled together, for the mere purpose of exhibiting specimens of every order of architecture; it was a

monument characterized by a simple and pure taste, and presenting that appearance of neglect which heightens picturesque effect. The long avenue leading to the entrance was overgrown with high grass; and the ivy drooped in irregular festoons over the porticoes and windows. To the eyes of Winckelmann, this disorder seemed to be the natural ornament of the sanctuary. The dilapidated walls; the partial decay, striving, as it were, to degenerate into ruin, was, in some sort, to the antiquary a foretaste of the rich museum he was about to inspect. In short, the first sight of the villa impressed him with the most favourable opinion of the Marquis de Pol . . . o. The nobleman who had thus suffered the hand of time to consecrate his domains, must of necessity be a worshipper of antiquity; and the learned visitor, never doubting the cordial reception that awaited him, said, on alighting from his carriage; "At length I have arrived!" in a tone of joy and hope like that with which the mariner, after a lingering voyage, exclaims, "Land! land!"

But alas! Winckelmann was wrecked in sight of port! Contrary to the hospitable custom almost invariably observed in Italy, the owner of the villa Pol . . . o prohibited all access to his rich collections.

What a disappointment to the enthusiast!

Throughout the whole of his journey from Rome, he had nursed himself in the expectation of viewing this magnificent museum of antiquities; and now he must return to Verona without seeing anything. How could he submit to such a mortification! To be on the very brink of the promised treasure, and then turn back! Impossible. Obstacles always had the effect of exciting his ardent mind; and in this instance he was resolved to surmount them. He had been informed that there was at the villa Pol . . . o an unique curiosity, a celebrated sarcophagus, taken from the Turks, near the Stadium of Olympus. Winckelmann could not forego a sight of this treasure; it was a gratification for which he was willing to offer the most humble and abject advances towards its owner. He was, however, told that the Marquis was obdurate . . . he would listen to no application . . . he was inflexibility personified. No matter! Winckelmann's passion, as an antiquary, was insatiable. He had resolved; and was ready to resort to stratagem, bribery; to scale the walls of the villa, or do anything for the attainment of his object. Had he not, for the sake of pre-eminence in his favourite studies, abjured the Protestant faith of his fathers, and adopted the Romish creed?

But before he should attempt, by any other than open means, to penetrate the sanctuary, Winckel-

mann deemed it advisable to obtain some intelligence respecting its occupants. ' .

In the course of his inquiries, he learned that the Marquis Manfrede Pol . . . o was the descendant of one of those proud nobles who long opposed at Genoa the dictatorship of Doria, and who, when finally banished from the republic, transferred their wealth and influence to other parts of Italy. But foreign domination wielding its iron sceptre over the fair land, put an end to active patrician life; and those heads of ancient houses who were too proud to bow to the usurping power, withdrew to the retirement of their own palaces—some to arrange fruitless conspiracies, and others to waste their lives in indolence and luxury. Among the latter, gaming became the predominant passion among the Italians. The Pol . . . o family fell into the popular *manie*, and were notorious gamesters.

At the time when Winckelmann undertook his journey from Rome to Berlin, the only remaining branches of this family were the Marquis, upwards of sixty, and his son Cinelli, a handsome young man of five-and-twenty. They, however, seemed to have emancipated themselves from the habits of their progenitors. The Marquis had, in his youth, it is true, been a most ardent votary of play. His day was regularly spent in calculating the chances by which he sought to realize

profit at night. Alternately depressed by gloomy despondency, and excited by irritability, the probability is, that suicide would have terminated his career, had it not been for his sudden reformation when his father died. This death, which occurred abroad, and quite unexpectedly, had the effect of bringing the Marquis to a sense of his duty, and caused him to renounce the propensity which had previously absorbed his mind.

To the astonishment of every one, the Marquis became quite a convert, plunging from one extreme into another¹. The man who had previously led a life of headlong dissipation, now secluded himself from society; he who had ridiculed learning, and scoffed at those who possessed it, now devoted himself to solitary study;—the prodigal became a miser. His retinue of servants was curtailed; his carriages were sold; and having disposed of most of his landed property, he retained only the villa Pol . . . o. There he led the life of an anchorite; his only servants being an old woman and her husband: the former officiating as housekeeper, and the latter as porter and steward.

¹ We wonder why M. Fleury, or the lady or gentleman who wrote these memoirs, should express any astonishment at this conversion—taken morally, religiously, or (most especially) politically, the convert from one side is invariably the most outrageous zealot on the other.—Ed.

Ignorant people dislike a miser infinitely more than a profligate; and the country-people of Mantua did not spare the reformed Marquis. "He has sacks of sequins, heaped one upon another," said they; "and he is so fearful of being robbed, that every evening he roams about his gardens to see whether any body is venturing to approach his treasure."

And of this treasure what extraordinary accounts were afloat! What inconceivable wealth the Marquis was said to possess! Old Matteo, the porter, when he had an extra glass of wine, was inclined to be loquacious; and then would sometimes talk upon his master's affairs to his gossiping friends. He was heard to say that the Marquis hid his riches under the floor of a superb pavilion, which was filled with pictures, statues, and antiques. Thither the miser was said frequently to repair, under the pretext of a love for the arts, but really for the purpose of looking at his diamonds, turning over his gold, and melting down a multitude of articles of plate into ingots. Matteo alleged that he had oftener than once watched him, on these nocturnal expeditions, when he would cover his lantern with his cloak, and glide mysteriously through the garden to the pavilion.

But, miser as he was, the Marquis had settled a very liberal allowance on his son. This young

man, though born to rank and wealth, had distinguished himself by extraordinary advancement in his studies. He was handsome, clever, and accomplished; and led the fashion among the young noblemen of Verona and Mantua;—not the fashion of extravagance and frivolity, but of taste and elegance. He evinced the noblest qualities of heart and disposition; and seemed destined to obliterate the remembrance of the long series of errors which had stigmatized his family. He frequented the best society of Verona and Mantua, and his eminent qualities, both of mind and person, had made him exceedingly popular. But the affections of Cinelli seemed to be reserved for one alone.

All the stories which were whispered among the country-people respecting the mysterious habits of the Marquis Pol . . . o, were confirmed to Winckelmann by Matteo. The antiquary had drawn the old steward into a long gossip; and with the help of a few glasses of wine, and a little gold, Matteo was prevailed on to devise a scheme for affording him a sight of the curiosities in the pavilion. “I will see you again in the evening,” said the old man. “To-night his Excellency is sure to be engaged; for the young Signor Cinelli has unexpectedly arrived at the villa.”

Leaving Winckelmann to enjoy in anticipation

the pleasure he expected which he anticipated from the fulfilment of Matteo's scheme, let us see what extraordinary occurrence has brought the son thus unexpectedly to his father's secluded dwelling.

Before we proceed further, it is necessary, however, to state a fact, which will serve as a key to the explanation of much that is to follow. The reader must be informed, that the fair character which Cinelli bore in the world, was earned by hypocrisy. Far from being exempt from the vice which had characterized so many of his family, he was a determined gamester.

His hypocrisy was assumed, not for the sake of imposing on the world, but of ingratiating himself with the woman whom he loved. Cinelli's heart was divided between two passions, which, as they say, seldom exist simultaneously in the same individual. He was at once a lover and a gamester. How earnestly did Cinelli wish that the noblest of these two passions could have absorbed the baser one. But impossible! He was alternately the slave of both. A kind look from the lovely daughter of Speroni would for the moment have caused him to renounce every sentiment save that of earnest devotion to the object of his affection; but, then, the chinking of gold carried him involuntarily to the card-table. His existence was

thus divided between the tenderest of sentiments and the most violent of excitements.

Among the frequenters of one of the principal gaming-houses of Verona, was a man named Archangeli. He had originally been a servant. His character was of the worst possible stamp; he had been convicted of several crimes, and even condemned to death, though pardoned through the misapplied kindness of a nobleman, who interested himself in his behalf. In spite of his low birth and once menial condition, Archangeli, who was gifted with considerable tact and intelligence, assumed a refinement of manner which effectually imposed upon those who had not previously known him, and by trickery and false representations, somehow got into the best society.

After having attentively studied the dispositions and circumstances of the young men who were most frequent visitors at the gaming-house, he fixed upon the elegant Cinelli as his victim. After winning from him all he possessed, he contrived to obtain a bond for the payment of a considerable sum of money, which Cinelli had no means of raising from any resources of his own.

Archangeli urgently pressed for the liquidation of the debt due to him; and Cinelli, fearing the disclosure of a truth which he had so strong an interest in concealing, entreated the favour of a further postponement of the payment.

“I must leave Verona to-morrow,” was Archangeli’s laconic reply.

“To-morrow!” said Cinelli; “. . . can’t you wait a little longer?”

“Till the evening only,” said Archangeli, “. . . and that for the honour of your name . . . Apply to your father.”

“Have I not already informed you that? . . .”

“That excuse is not worthy consideration,” said the creditor; “besides, is there not a family in Verona with whom you are about to become closely allied?”

“What is that to the purpose?” asked Cinelli.

“Nothing,” answered Archangeli; “except that if you do not pay me before six o’clock to-morrow, I will myself go to that family, and insist upon having the money advanced out of the bride’s dowry.”

“You shall die first,” exclaimed young Cinelli, indignantly.

“That would be settling the matter like a bravo,” said the gambler, “and not like a man of honour; and perhaps I may not be quite willing to consent to the arrangement. To-morrow, then, at the hour I have named, be ready with the money, or I will apply to the Speroni family.”

As these words were uttered, a thrill of terror agitated the frame of young Cinelli. He hung down his head, closed his eyes, crossed his

arms on his bosom, and seemed absorbed in reverie. In a few moments, rousing himself from this gloomy thoughtfulness, he turned to Archangeli, and said: "You shall be paid at the hour you name, sir."

He instantly set off to the Villa Pol . . . o. But despair was in his heart, for he knew his father's obstinate avarice, and his most sanctimonious hatred of gaming. The latter feeling had indeed, since his conversion, been manifested with a degree of energy, which left no hope to the guilty Cinelli. That he should have to brave the imprecations of his aged father, he expected; but what was *that* to the horror of being discarded in disgrace by the family of his beloved Cinthia! . . . Still Archangeli would doubtless execute his threat of revealing the affair . . . That thought decided him in his course.

When he arrived at the villa, the explanation of the cause of his visit gave rise to a terrible scene of violence between Cinelli and his father; entreaties were answered only by firm refusals, and threats on the part of the son, called forth imprecations from the parent.

"Shame be on your name, father," said Cinelli . . . "You refuse, then, to save my honour? . . ."

"Shame be on you!" retorted the father. "It is not the loss of your honour that concerns you, but the sacrifice of your boyish love."

“It is barbarous to refuse me,” said the son.

“It is just to punish you,” replied the father.

“Father,” said Cinelli, “you have treasures here, and I *will* possess them . . . they are mine . . . I am in the home of my ancestors . . . in my own home.”

“My son,” said the old marquis, “I can brave your menaces, but nevertheless, I warn you to beware of what you say.”

Having uttered these words, the marquis hastily withdrew from the apartment, and closing the door after him, locked it, and carried away the key. Cinelli, maddened by anger and despair, opened a window, and leaped from a height of nearly twenty feet into the garden below.

There he determined to conceal himself until the middle of the night. He was armed, and there were but two aged servants in the house. What then had he to fear? During the altercation which had just ensued between him and his parent, Cinelli had been once or twice on the point of resorting to some dreadful violence to gain his object.

Cinelli did not accurately know the spot where his father had deposited his treasures; but the story which was current in the neighbourhood had reached his ears, and he resolved to remain concealed in a thicket, until the hour when it was said that the Marquis made his nocturnal visit to the pavilion. . . . At length he heard an indistinct noise. He

listened : it was the sound of footsteps. In another moment, the approach of a dim light enabled him to perceive the outline of a phantom-like figure, enveloped in long drapery. He held his breath. A fearful emotion took possession of him. The figure and the light glided towards one of the angles of the house, and then vanished. He thought his eyes had deceived him, but advancing from his hiding-place, he saw distinctly that the supposed phantom was a reality . . . The rays of light now fell on the face of the figure, and Cinelli, as he had anticipated, recognized his father.

The countenance of the Marquis, always pale, now seemed to wear the hue of death. He appeared to be partly undressed, but a large cloak was thrown negligently over his shoulders. He wore no hat, and his grey locks hung in disorder about his ears and forehead. He walked at a slow and measured pace, and kept his eyes fixed straight before him, looking neither on one side nor the other. Cinelli softly followed him. He reached the pavilion, entered it, and his son noiselessly glided in after him. The Marquis advanced to a sarcophagus adorned with *bas reliefs*, one of the many objects of antique art which the pavilion contained. Cinelli doubted not that that sarcophagus was the depository of the miser's gold.

The old man knelt down, sighed, and then ejaculated, in a low hollow voice: "He spoke of my treasure, and said he would seek it. *My* treasure, alas! It is a legacy well befitting a gamester to bequeath, and a gamester to inherit."

He set his lamp down on the floor, and was preparing by an effort of strength to move aside the lid of the sarcophagus. "I am here to claim my inheritance," exclaimed Cinelli, darting forward with a sudden rush which made the whole pavilion resound. Winckelmann almost started from his hiding-place; for it is time to inform the reader that Matteo had kept his word, and the antiquary, who sought only to regale his eyes with some rare wonder of art, became an involuntary witness of this scene of terror.

The Marquis, by a movement no less sudden than that of his son, turned round, and seated himself on the cover of the sarcophagus, then drawing a dagger from his bosom, he held it pointed towards Cinelli . . . "Rise, old man!" said the latter, wresting the weapon from his father's hand. "Rise, I say, or this dagger shall speedily make me your heir . . . We are alone, remember . . . There are but two of us here!"

"There are three," said the old man calmly; and raising the lid of the sarcophagus with as much facility as if his arms had possessed the muscular

vigour of youth, he repeated: "There are three of us here . . . Behold! here is my treasure."

The young man looked into the sarcophagus, and starting back with surprise and horror, exclaimed, "A corpse!"

"Look again, young Marquis de Pol . . . o," said the old man; "and ere you stain your hand with a parent's blood, know that there lies your grandfather . . . *my* father! He fell by my hand! I am a parricide! He refused *me* money, as I have refused *you*; like you I thought the honour of the gamester inexorable. *I* laid him there! Since then, the curse of the parricide has been upon me. My nights have been sleepless; my days without repose: the prolongation of my life is only the prolongation of my misery."

Having uttered these words, the old Marquis sank down in a state of insensibility. His son raised him, for the purpose of conveying him from the scene of horror; but before quitting the fatal pavilion, he turned to close the opening of the sarcophagus, when a broken fragment of the marble lid fell to the ground, and extinguished the lamp. Winckelmann, doubtless, seized that opportunity of making his escape; for, a few days after the occurrences above detailed, he was, as we know, at Verona, visiting his friend Madame Speroni.

What passed between him and the young Mar-

quis de Pol...o, during their mysterious interview at Verona, consequent upon that visit, is unknown; but it is conjectured that, in consequence of having involuntarily become acquainted with the family secret, he considered himself in a disagreeable if not perilous position. On his route to Berlin, the celebrated antiquary had intended to pass through Dessau, where he was to meet the father of Cinthia Speroni. The Marquis Pol...o and his son had the strongest motives for endeavouring to prevent the accomplishment of this journey. Some intimidation was doubtless offered Winckelmann,—some oath exacted from him. This very natural supposition serves to solve the enigma of the singular journal of the sculptor Cavaceppi, of Winckelmann's sudden departure from Verona, and of his disinclination to proceed to Berlin, although that place was the real object of his journey. His mental depression amidst all the honours and attentions that were heaped upon him, may be explained in like manner. His unexpected resolution to return to Rome, by travelling through the south of Germany, and then proceeding by sea to one of the ports of Italy, must not necessarily be regarded as the caprice of a disordered mind; it may have been the result of well-founded alarm, as the following facts tend too fatally to prove.

Winckelmann, on separating from Cavaceppi, proceeded by the public coach to Trieste. The published accounts which appeared in the Italian journals of the murder of Winckelmann, state that, at the time the coach started, he was the only passenger ; but that, at some distance from Trieste, he was joined by a travelling companion, with whom he entered into conversation. This man was no other than Archangeli, whose name is already known to the reader. He soon made himself acquainted with Winckelmann's weak points, and by affecting an enthusiastic love of the arts, and an extravagant admiration of the learned antiquary himself, succeeded in ingratiating himself into his favour and confidence. Winckelmann was in that painful condition of mind, to which social communion affords the best relief, and he became so pleased with the unknown traveller, that he admitted him to his intimacy, and showed him the gold medals which had been presented to him by the court of Austria.

On arriving at Trieste with his new acquaintance, Winckelmann found himself obliged to wait several days, until a vessel should sail for Ancona. Not wishing to visit or receive visits, he confined himself to the hotel, whilst Archangeli undertook to make the requisite inquiries respecting the departure of the vessel.

Only two days before his melancholy death,

wishing to avoid the chance of being met by any one who might know him in Trieste, he requested his officious companion to post a letter, or rather several letters under one envelope, which he addressed to M. Stosch, at Dessau.

On the 8th of June, 1768, between one and two o'clock in the afternoon, Winckelmann sat down to write a letter to the future editor of his new edition of the "History of Art." In the unfinished letter, which was found after the murder, lying on the table, Winckelmann had entered into some details respecting the typographical arrangements for the publication. Whilst engaged in writing this letter, he was interrupted by Archangeli, who, with well dissembled concern, announced that they must separate, he having been summoned to Venice by urgent business.

Winckelmann had reposed such confidence in his new acquaintance, that he had never deemed it necessary to make any inquiry respecting his condition or occupations. He took him on his own representations. Archangeli bade him an affectionate farewell, and begged that, as a last token of kindness, he would allow him once more to look at the medals, that they might be the more vividly impressed on his recollection. Winckelmann, delighted with this proof of love for the arts, gladly consented to gratify the pre-

tended amateur. He ran to his portmanteau, and knelt down for the purpose of unfastening the padlock.

Archangeli stepped softly behind him, and drawing from his pocket a cord with a slip knot, threw it over the neck of his victim with the intention of strangling him. But the cord catching the chin of Winckelmann, the design of the assassin was, for the moment, frustrated. Recovering from the stunning surprise into which the unexpected attack had thrown him, Winckelmann rose to defend himself. He seized the cord, and held it fast. The assassin then drew a dagger, and plunged it several times into his heart.

Archangeli was arrested, tried, and condemned. When about to undergo the penalty due to his crime, he confessed the murder, but persisted in declaring that he had been actuated by no other motive than that of possessing himself of the medals. Circumstances, however, tend strongly to refute this declaration. On the day preceding the murder, it appeared that Archangeli had intended to carry his sanguinary design into execution, and was only induced to forego it for the time by the kindness with which Winckelmann had invited him to partake of his breakfast. On the same day, as it was afterwards ascertained, the box containing the medals was in the coach with

Archangeli's luggage. The probability is, that the alleged intention of stealing the medals was a mere pretext set forth with the view of averting suspicion. But, then, it may be asked, supposing Archangeli to have been merely a hired assassin, the paid instrument of others, why did he not denounce his accomplices? The answer is, that there are recesses in the human heart, which it is not easy to explore, and that the vilest criminals have sometimes a sort of virtue of their own. It is a well-known fact that, in Italy, the *bravi* who may be hired to commit murder, have endured the torture rather than betray their employers. This sort of firmness they term keeping the *honour of the dagger unstained*. The betrayal of an accomplice is, in *their* eyes, a greater crime than the shedding of blood. This kind of firmness is not unfrequently the only imaginary virtue of those who have renounced every other.

CHAPTER XXI.

Fashionable vehicles.—A narrow escape and a gallant compliment.

—Prince Henry of Prussia.—His letter to Mademoiselle Contat.

—Tribute to the memory of Frederick the Great.—The re-

hearsal.—Mademoiselle Contat and the embarrassed author.—

Words of consolation.—Mercier lays aside his intended new

play.—My disappointment atoned for.—Pieyre's *Ecole des*

Pères.—Testimonials of royal favour.—The King's present to

me.—His majesty's kind message.—My successful performance

at Condé.—Compliment paid me by the Count d'Artois.—Green-

room tête-à-tête with Mademoiselle Contat.—She secures to me

the character of Frederick the Great—My careful study of the

part.—Ramberg's portrait of Frederick II.—A copy in the

manner of Mademoiselle Guimard.—Anecdote.—*Les Deux*

Pages.—Mirabeau's secret history of the court of Berlin.—

Snuff-box presented to me by Prince Henry of Prussia.—The

author of *Les Deux Pages*.

THERE was a time when no lady in Paris, having any pretension to elegance, could dispense with a whisky: it was the fashionable equipage of the

day. Whiskys were seen darting along in every direction, to the imminent danger of pedestrians who attempted to cross from one side of a street to another. One day, our beautiful young actress, Mademoiselle Contat, was driving across the Pont Neuf in a whisky, when a circumstance occurred, to which, singularly enough, I was indebted for my favourable position at the Théâtre Français.

The light vehicle was dashing rapidly across the bridge, and, in compliance with the mandate of imperious fashion, our charming Suzanne was driving. Doubtless she held the reins with more grace than skill, for in the middle of the bridge, precisely facing the Rue Dauphine, a gentleman was nearly knocked down by the elegant little carriage. Whether the fault lay with the gentleman or the fair whisky-driver, seemed to be a doubtful question; for, after suddenly pulling up the horse, Contat exclaimed in a somewhat angry tone:

“What do you mean, sir, by running against a horse in this manner?”

“I beg your pardon, madame,” said the unfortunate gentleman; “but I really think the horse ran against me.”

“Impossible, sir,” said Suzanne.

“Then, madame,” replied the gentleman, “per-

haps you will confess that we were both in fault."

"No, sir," said the fair Contat, "I will confess nothing of the sort. . . . My horse is perfectly under control . . . besides, I called *gare!* and you never looked round . . ."

"Truly, madame," said her opponent, "you have more need to say *gare* now, when I do look round. The danger is in looking at you."

During this little dialogue, Mademoiselle Contat's groom had alighted for the purpose of arranging some little disorder of the harness; and the gallant gentleman having first made his compliment, next made his bow, and departed.

On her arrival at the theatre, Mademoiselle Contat related her adventure. Molé and I had been waiting for her; we were rehearsing a little piece called "*Les Rivaux Amis*," in which she had a part. Contat possessed the art of imparting interest to the most trivial circumstances, by her manner of describing them; and apparently, with the intention of averting the ill humour of Molé, (who, like all unpunctual people, was exceedingly angry when he was kept waiting,) she told us the history of her little adventure on the Pont Neuf. We were all interested in the story; but what surprised us most was, that though Contat de-

scribed the gentleman as having the appearance of a person of rank and fashion, she had no idea whom he was. This certainly appeared not a little strange; for our *coulisses* were at that time the favourite resort of men of quality, and there was scarcely an individual of that class, who was not more or less known to the actors. Moreover, we felt quite certain that any gentleman who could pay so gallant a compliment to a lady by whom he had been nearly killed only the moment before, must necessarily be one of those who frequented our green-room, to give and receive lessons of *bon ton* and elegance.

We took a review of the whole court, and mentioned every celebrated personage of whom we could think, but without success; no one resembled the stranger described by Mademoiselle Contat. At length, in despair of solving the mystery, we gave up guessing.

Nearly a month had elapsed, and the little adventure was almost forgotten, when Mademoiselle Contat received a billet conched in the following terms:

“The gentleman who lately had the honour of a moment’s conversation with the modern Thalia on the Pont Neuf, requests to know whether she

can devote a leisure hour to the rehearsal of a piece in two acts, about to be produced at the Comédie Italienne, in which the writer of this note is greatly interested.

(Signed)

“HENRY.”

Henry! . . . Who in the name of wonder could this Henry be! . . . An author, no doubt; but nobody knew any author of that name; and Mademoiselle Contat thought that, for a young author, the gentleman she had nearly upset on the Pont Neuf was somewhat too old. She was decidedly of opinion, that he was even beyond that period of life when inspiration first dawned on M. Francaleu¹.

Urged by a natural feeling of curiosity, and also by a desire of being useful, if she could render herself so, Contat repaired to the Comédie Italienne. She inquired what was the title of the piece, in two acts, about to be rehearsed. The answer was, that there were several two-act pieces preparing for representation.

“But,” pursued she, “which of them is written by M. Henry?”

“None;” was the reply.

The mystery seemed to thicken, and Contat was

¹ “Et j’avais cinquante ans quand cela m’arriva.”—*Métro-manie*.

at her wit's end, when she heard a voice behind her, exclaiming : "Mademoiselle Contat ! . . . where is Mademoiselle Contat ?" Turning round, she saw Dezède the composer.

"Ah, madame," said he, bowing, "how happy I am to see you. I have a most particular favour to request."

"What is it, Monsieur Dezède ?" said the lady. . . . "But, to tell you the truth, I am very much engaged ; and if the favour is to be rendered to-day . . ."

"This very moment, madame," answered the composer. . . . "I want you to assist us in the rehearsal of a first act."

"A first act !" exclaimed Contat. "How many acts does your piece consist of, two or three ?"

"Two."

"Are you the author as well as the composer ?" inquired Thalia.

"No, madame," said Dezède. "That double task demands the powers of a Jean-Jacques."

"The author of your piece is named Henry," said she. . . . "Is he not ?"

"No, madame, that is not his name."

"Is he not a very good-looking man ?"

"Very," said the composer.

"He has fine eyes, an open countenance, and a military air ? . . ."

“He has.”

“It is he! The very man!” said the actress.
“But is this his first production? He is not a very young beginner. He must be between fifty and sixty.”

“Oh no!” said Dezède. “He cannot be more than five-and-thirty.”

“Pooh, nonsense!” said Mademoiselle. “I would lay you a wager that he is nearly sixty.”

“Well, madame,” answered Dezède, “I will not dispute the point; but if he is as old as you state, he certainly disguises his age admirably . . . But see! here he comes!”

A gentleman somewhat above thirty at that moment entered. He was a person of elegant air and figure, with a handsome and intellectual countenance.

“*Ma foi!*” exclaimed Contat, “I find I must give some explanation of my conduct . . . If it be not strictly decorous for a lady to go in search of a gentleman, what will be thought of a principal actress of the Théâtre Français going in quest of an author!”

She then smilingly unfolded the little note of invitation signed Henry, which was passed from hand to hand, until it reached the gentleman whose entrance Dezède had noticed.

No sooner did he cast his eyes upon it, than he

uttered an exclamation of joy, kissed the paper, and then stood gazing upon the lines with an air of fervent respect.

“Henry! Henry!” he exclaimed, dashing a tear from his eye. “Henry, ever kind, noble, and generous!”

“And to me ever unknown!” exclaimed Contat, with an air of playful indifference, which did not quite conceal her disappointment.

“Unknown! . . . all the world knows him.”

“Nay, sir,” said she; “there is at least one person in the world who is not in the secret. That one is myself. For pity’s sake do tell me who he is, or I shall certainly die of curiosity.”

“Is it possible, madame,” said the stranger, “that you are not aware that this note is written by Prince Henry of Prussia!”

“The brother of Frederick the Great?” said Contat.

“The same . . . Count Oels.”

“I breathe again,” said Contat. “It is well he is the brother of a king, and a hero into the bargain. . . . I pardon him for the sake of the *coup de théâtre*.”

“And for the sake of his recommendation, madame,” resumed the author, “I venture to hope that you will favour *me*.”

With these words, Prince Henry's *protegé* led Mademoiselle Contat aside, and explained to her the position in which he stood.

His little drama was intended as a tribute to the memory of Frederick the Great: it was an anecdotic piece, in the style of the "Partie de Chasse de Henri IV." "I am naturally anxious," observed the author, "to have it brought out in a style worthy of the subject; but they have given me singers instead of actors. The first act, especially, which is merely introductory, will be perfectly ineffective, and will condemn the whole piece, if you do not lend me your powerful aid."

Contat inquired how she could oblige the gallant prince, and help the embarrassed author. The latter replied, that several of his principal scenes were laid in an inn; that the character of a young and pretty hostess, destined to enliven these scenes, had been refused by Madame Dugazon, as beneath her talents; and that the character was, in consequence, allotted to an actress who was anxious to do her best, but whose talents were not fitted for it.

"Well," inquired Contat, "and what do you wish me to do?"

"To see a rehearsal: to convince yourself of the importance of the part, and to use your influence with Madame Dugazon, who is always readily

guided by your judgment, to induce her to take it."

Contat listened attentively to the proposition of the distressed author, at the same time assuming one of her characteristic looks and gestures, that is to say, she inclined her body a little forward, gently bowed her head, half closed her eyes, and contracted her lips, as if to repress one of those sarcasms, ever struggling to escape, and which frequently gave an expression of sharpness to things which would otherwise have seemed indifferent.

"Pray inform me, sir," said she, "what victories Prince Henry has gained?"

This question not a little astonished the author, and he was puzzled to guess what the lovely actress meant by it. He replied that Prince Henry, the rival of Frederick, was a general, of whose military achievements a long catalogue might be given. He, however, merely mentioned the deliverance of Breslau, the campaigns of Dresden, the victory of Torgau, and the laurels gathered on the fields of Kollin and Prague, and at the invasion of Bohemia.

"Well," resumed Contat, "Breslau and Dresden, Kollin and Torgau, Prague and Bohemia . . . all these are nothing in comparison with the battles which must be fought, at the Comédie

Italienne, to attain the object which the Prince desires. The attempt to take a part from an actress who has possession of it, and force it back upon one who has rejected it, is a bold enterprize, demanding a degree of courage and good generalship worthy of Prince Henry himself . . . but, unfortunately, it is impossible¹!”

The author, who furnished me with these details, was deeply mortified by Mademoiselle Contat's declaration, and observed, that he then had no alternative but to withdraw his piece.

“Stay,” said Contat, . . . “let us have the rehearsal. . . . Perhaps something may be suggested!”

The piece, consequently, was rehearsed in the presence of Mademoiselle Contat. She listened with profound attention, but betrayed no signs either of satisfaction or disapproval. The poor author was in despair. He watched every look and gesture, in the hope of surmising what the great actress thought; but without success. Nevertheless, some circumstances gave him hopes. She had intended to see only the first act of the re-

¹ Sophie Arnould, speaking to Monsieur Amelot of the disturbances which agitated the French opera in 1776, said to him, who had in 1771 mainly contributed to the dissolution and reconstruction of the parliament of Dijon: “Vous devez savoir, Monseigneur, qu'il est plus aisé de composer un parlement qu'un opéra.”—ED.

hearsal—she stayed till the conclusion. Those who knew the petulant and impatient temper of our Suzanne, and her readiness to express her feelings, whether of pleasure or displeasure, could not but be astonished at seeing her so quiet. Our author, who did not know her peculiarities of temper, regarded her silence as the indication of an unfavourable judgment of his piece. When the rehearsal was over, he summoned up all his courage, and advanced to her, in expectation of hearing his doom.

“ You love and revere the memory of the great Frederick,” said Contat.

The author replied only by laying his hand on his heart, whilst the expression of his countenance sufficiently denoted his feelings.

“ Enough,” said Contat. . . . “ I must now take my leave of you. Request Dezède to come to me at the Théâtre Française; and when you see Prince Henry, inform his royal highness that his wish shall be complied with.”

I must now draw the reader's attention to some matters personally concerning myself. A little coolness had risen up between me and Mercier. He had, it is true, done me a favour by giving me the principal character in “ *La Maison de Molière*.” But I had been elated with hopes of Winckelmann; and Mercier, after holding out to me the allurements of that finely-conceived part,

abandoned his intention of bringing out the piece, without, as far as I could see, any valid reason. However, the disappointment which I sustained was not of long duration. The moment was at hand when my star was destined to shine out brightly; and the high road to theatrical fame was opened to me by M. Pieyre's "*Ecole des Pères*." In that piece I had the opportunity of developing powers for which few had previously given me credit. For this opportunity I was indebted to M. Pieyre himself, who insisted that his distribution of the parts should remain unaltered; and I should be wanting in gratitude, were I not to acknowledge the advantage I gained by playing that which he had allotted to me.

The appearance of the "*Ecole des Pères*" excited an unusual degree of interest. It was the triumph of elegant comedy over pieces of an indecorous and immoral stamp, which had previously disgraced the French stage. The King and Queen were anxious to encourage writers who sought to give a tone of superior refinement to dramatic literature, and young Pieyre was much distinguished. The King directed M. Duras to write to him, for the purpose of requesting he would name a reward that would be agreeable to him. The poet made choice of a plain sword; and was accordingly presented with a splendid Damascus blade, ornamented with his majesty's arms. The Queen, with her

usual grace of manner, observed, that “a sword was a very proper present from the King; but that it was not a gift by which *she* should wish to mark her approbation of the author’s talents.” Her majesty accordingly sent to inquire what favour *she* could confer on the successful dramatist. M. Pieyre, previously to the performance of his piece at the Théâtre Français, had had his name placed on the list of authors whose plays were to be performed at court; but, without any plausible reason, he had been struck off the list by that same Duke de Duras to whom he afterwards had so much cause to be grateful. On receiving the Queen’s message, M. Pieyre conceived that the success of the “Ecole des Pères” fully justified him in soliciting the honour of being once more inscribed on the favoured list. His request was immediately granted; and that which was only an act of justice to *him*, proved a very fortunate event for *me*.

Whenever a new or revived play was represented at the court theatres of Versailles, Fontainebleau, Marly, or Trianon, it was customary for the King to present to the principal actor a coat, to be worn in the character he had to perform. On the “Ecole des Pères” being brought out at court, the usual present was sent to me; but, either through inadvertence, or, what is more probable, a profuse liberality on the part of his majesty, a magnificent dress-coat was sent to me,

whilst the character I was to personate required a very plain one. On returning thanks for the present, I made the observation that his majesty had been too generous, and that the coat was far too elegant. Shortly afterwards, I received a visit from M. Desentelles, who conveyed to me the following gracious reply : " If M. Fleury cannot wear the coat in the 'Ecole des Pères,' it is the King's wish that he should choose for the next court performance a character to which it may be suitable, as his majesty will feel pleasure in seeing M. Fleury wear it." My gratitude may be readily conceived. I was fortunate enough to obtain great approbation in the "Ecole des Pères," in my plain coat ; and for my next performance before the court, I requested permission to play the Marquis, in "Tarcaret."

That play was accordingly prepared, and when the day of performance arrived, I was quite elated by my good fortune. The Marquis de Lauret was one of the characters which I had tried in Mademoiselle Guimard's theatre, and it was one of those to which I thought myself capable of giving effect. My acting was, it is true, mere imitation. The character was one of that class, in the representation of which memory is a more useful quality than intelligence. On the evening on which "Tarcaret" was played at court, I was excited by the presence of their majesties, and fancied that

I seized more successfully than ever that delicate glimmering of reason which penetrates through drunkenness, and the drunkenness which is ever on the point of gaining the ascendancy over reason. I threw a more forcible expression of humour into the peculiar glance and smile which had previously earned for me no small share of approbation. I suffered my gaiety to escape, even to overflowing; and the humorous sallies with which the character is interspersed, excited reiterated bursts of laughter. The Count d'Artois, alluding to my successful performance, said: "I have seen Molé, in the Marquis de Lauret; but he seemed to have got drunk only on *Piquette*; Fleury's drunkenness was the drunkenness of Champagne."

This observation helped, in no small degree, to give *éclat* to my performance; and many persons of considerable influence at court, expressed regret that I had not been brought more prominently forward. Those who were warmest in my praise, doubtless gave me credit for more talent than I really possessed; and the merit of my few successful essays was magnified in a way calculated to alarm me. I had now reached that point in my profession, when the public expected me to rise to distinction. To me this was an awful crisis. My friends had erected the pedestal before they knew whether the statue was worthy to be placed on it; and I felt assured, that, should the statue

prove unequal to their expectations, they would avenge their disappointment by unmercifully dashing it to pieces. Long and earnestly as I had wished to have a character written for me, yet I now dreaded lest any author should offer to render me such an act of service. The character might not suit me, and my failure would be my ruin. The choice of a character is no less important to an actor than is the choice of a subject to an author. To fulfil the expectations of the public, it is always necessary to exceed them.

The theatrical season of 1788-89, had just begun, when I was one day sitting in our green-room, chatting with Mademoiselle Contat. I expressed to her my apprehensions on the subject to which I have just adverted, and asked for her advice, assured that she would give it me in all the sincerity of friendship. I related to her my dreams of future success: she, too, had had her dreams, but they were now gloriously realized. "I want," said I, "a character which shall not fall into the line of any of our present generation of actors. The depth of Mouvel is fresh in the remembrance of the public; I do not wish a character that would bring me into comparison with him. On the other hand, I cannot hope to attain the bold style of Molé, and the brilliant finish of his acting. . . . Neither would I have one of those agreeable rakes . . . and I have a still greater

aversion from a sentimental lover. In short, I should wish . . . I should wish for . . .”

“Something impossible!” interrupted Contat.

“No,” resumed I, “not impossible. All I want is a character which would screen me from comparison, and in which, if I may so express myself, I should have elbow-room. A character of such an original cast, that the public would be astonished to see Fleury attempt it . . . a character, in fine, like *Suzanne*, which raised you at once to such well-merited distinction.”

“But remember, Fleury,” said she, “I had no objection to the waiting-maid’s cap and apron; but your pride would rebel against the footman’s livery.”

“Well,” I answered, “I do confess I have a strong antipathy to wearing a livery.”

“Shall I propose a character for you?”

“With all my heart!”

“How would you like to act a prince?” said Contat.

“I have never been accustomed to fill so high a rank,” replied I; “but still, if that be the only difficulty . . .”

“Do you think you could command a hundred thousand men?” said the lady.

“A hundred thousand!” exclaimed I. . . .
“There will be many refractory subjects among them, I fear . . . But with Mademoiselle’s Contat’s recommendation . . .”

"Fleury," said the lady, "I suspect you have some idea of what I am going to tell you!"

"What will you wager that I have not?" said I.

"Pooh! . . . Why trouble me to explain that which you are already aware of?"

"Of your kind intentions and friendly feelings I am fully aware," said I; "and I also know the trouble you have taken to transport "Frederick the Great" from the Comédie Italienne to our stage. I know, too, that the author wished to place the sceptre in the hands of Dugazon, and that you have been pleased to think me more worthy to wield it. Whilst the discussions were pending, and the question was a preference between myself and one of my comrades, I thought it would best become me to remain silent . . . But now that all is decided, let me express my gratitude to the fullest extent . . . Be assured that my heart will ever cherish a faithful remembrance of your kindness. You have afforded me the means of earning success, and establishing a reputation. And now, whilst I express my gratitude as a friend, let me embrace you in my character of King . . ."

"Then," said she laughingly, "you know that I am to play your humble subject the hostess."

Without replying, I cordially embraced my kind and excellent friend. The kiss I imprinted on her cheek, resounded through the whole green-room.

“Did anything fall?” exclaimed Dugazon, who was gossiping in a corner with young Talma.

“Yes, yes,” I exclaimed, in a transport of joy and happiness; “a bolt has fallen on your head, and a crown on mine.”

At the rehearsal of the little piece patronised by Prince Henry, Mademoiselle Contat had been so struck with its merit, that she determined to spare no exertions to get it transferred from the Comédie Italienne to the Comédie Française. With that quickness of perception with which she was so eminently gifted, she saw at a glance that the character contained materials sufficient of themselves to make the reputation of any actor who was capable of turning them to good account. She kindly thought of *me*, and, for the sake of bringing about the wished-for arrangement between Dezède and the author of the piece, she herself offered to play the character of the hostess.

This offer, of course, settled the point at issue, and secured to me one of those lucky chances, which occur but rarely in the life of an actor. The character was quite of an original stamp, nothing of the kind had before been attempted. It was my task to represent a man who had just closed a wonderful career, and on whom the eyes of all Europe had been anxiously fixed. Few things are better calculated to ensure popularity on the stage, than an historical name of recent

date. If the actor be capable of embodying even a tolerable resemblance to his model, he establishes, in the minds of his audience, a sort of association between himself and the eminent person he represents. It is a resurrection which involuntarily creates interest. The stage representation of a hero, dead as it were but yesterday, unavoidably produces a powerful impression. The actor performs the functions of the Pythoness, and the evocation can scarcely fail of establishing his popularity. I was fully sensible of all the advantages which my new character offered, and I determined to make the most of them. I laboured hard to render myself a fitting representative of Frederick II.

“*Les deux Pages*” was received at the Comédie Française two months previously to the Easter holidays, and I consequently had time to seek and obtain much valuable information relative to Frederick. The author himself furnished me with many useful hints, as did likewise an officer in the suite of Prince Henry. M. Saint L——, a friend of mine, who had lived long in Prussia, communicated to me many curious details relating to the philosopher of Sans-Souci; and Saint Fal procured for me an excellent portrait of Frederick the Great, by Ramberg. The name of the artist was a sufficient guarantee for the accuracy of the

likeness. My arsenal being thus furnished, I began to arrange my plan of battle.

In the first place, I sought to imbue myself with the idea that my apartments were in Potsdam instead of in Paris; and I resolved to go to bed, to rise, to take my meals, to move and speak, during two whole months, in the full persuasion that I was Frederick II. The better to identify myself with the character, I used every morning to dress myself in the military coat, hat, boots, &c., which I had ordered for the part. Thus equipped, I would seat myself before my looking-glass, at one side of which hung Ramberg's portrait of the king. Then, with the help of hair pencils, and a palette spread with black, white, red, blue, and yellow, I endeavoured to paint my face to a resemblance of the picture. By this method, as I have already said, Mademoiselle Guimard succeeded in defying the advances of age, and never looked more than twenty; but my object was to make myself look old instead of young. Meanwhile, the rehearsals commenced, and, after reigning incognito for the space of two months, the great king was ready to appear on the stage of the Comédie Française¹.

¹ The perfection of assumption of character, was achieved in this very part some years since on the English stage, by Mr. Farren, at Covent Garden Theatre.—ED.

For the information of those who may not have seen or read the little drama of "Les Deux Pages," I will here relate the anecdote on which the piece is founded.

Frederick the Great one day rang his bell, and the summons was unanswered. He opened the door of the apartment, and beheld his page reclining in an arm-chair, asleep. The King was about to awaken the youth, when he perceived the corner of a note protruding from his pocket. His Majesty's curiosity was excited: he softly drew the letter from the pocket of the page, and read it. It was from the young man's mother, acknowledging the receipt of a portion of his salary, sent to relieve her wants, and expressing a hope that Heaven would reward his goodness. The King, having read the letter, returned to his apartment, and in another moment softly crept out again, with a rouleau of ducats in his hand, and slipped it, together with the letter, into the pocket of the page. Then, having once more returned to his apartment, and closed the door, he rang the bell with sufficient violence to rouse the young page from his slumber, and he hurried to attend the King.

"Have you been sleeping?" said Frederick . . .
"I have rung the bell twice."

The page endeavoured to excuse himself, and

in his embarrassment, thrusting his hand into his pocket, he felt the rouleau. He drew it out, turned pale, and gazed on the King without being able to utter a word.

“What have you got there?” said Frederick.

“Ah, sire!” exclaimed the young man, throwing himself on his knees, “some enemy is seeking my ruin. I assure your Majesty I know nothing of this money, or by what means it came into my pocket.”

“No matter, my good lad,” said the King in a tone of kindness. “Heaven often sends us good luck in our sleep. Forward the sum to your mother: give her my regards, and tell her that I will provide for *her* as well as for you.”

To this touching little anecdote, which was of course too meagre to form the whole subject of the piece, the author added the first act, of the success of which at the Comédie Italienne, he was so doubtful without the aid of Mademoiselle Contat. In this introductory act, the mother and sister of the page are brought to Berlin, and lodged in an inn, where they are treated with great kindness on its becoming known that they are the widow and daughter of an officer, the former patron of the host and hostess, who become their security to a harsh and unjust creditor. As a contrast to the modest and amiable

young page, the author gave him a thoughtless young companion, whose wit and vivacity infused animation into the scenes in which he appeared.

The walls of Paris were placarded with announcements of the new piece, and public interest was highly excited. No piece was ever more strongly cast; all the force of the *Comédie Française* was engaged in it. Contat, Dazincour, Mademoiselle Contat, Madame Petit, Madame Bellecourt, Raucourt (in the character of the mother), and myself, in the part of the King. Such was the phalanx arrayed in support of the posthumous glory of Frederick the Great. At length the night of performance arrived, and the curtain rose.

The first act went off brilliantly; which it could scarcely fail of doing, supported as it was by the united talents of Dazincour and Contat. The latter was irresistibly charming. Her beauty, grace, and vivacity, never produced a more fascinating impression; and her singing (for she was truly a delightful singer) gave full effect to the airs which Dezède had composed for the piece. All this was enough, and more than enough, to secure success to the first act; but in the second, Frederick was to appear.

Frederick was not afraid, though he had to present himself to an imposing auditory, and a formidable array of critical judges. There were

the Dukes of Orleans and Nivernois, and their literary coteries. I was aware of the list of distinguished persons by whom the boxes were engaged. In the first tier there were Madame de Sabran and her son, and Madame de la Châtre. Several of the Deputies of the States-General were pointed out to me; among them was one, whose large head and bushy wig filled up nearly the whole space of the box. I inquired his name; the answer was, M. de Mirabeau. It was also whispered to me that Prince Henry, half concealed in the box of the Marshal de Beauvan, would judge the truth of a picture, of which his heroic brother was the principal figure.

My turn came, and I made my entrance. I will not attempt to describe the awful stillness which prevailed throughout the theatre. To use a common expression, one might have heard a pin fall; Dazincour alleged that he had heard the unfolding of a lady's cambric handkerchief. The sentinels presented arms to me. I cast a scrutinizing glance on the martial attitude of my two soldiers: to the sentinel on the left I gave a shrug of dissatisfaction, whilst to the other I directed a smile, indicating approbation, perhaps a forthcoming reward. The pit continued unmoved; and I said within myself, my thoughts still directed to the sentinel, you shall have the cross of merit.

That instant, as though the thought had been a signal, a torrent of applause burst from every part of the theatre. Then, when I turned to speak, silence was again restored, though again frequently interrupted by bursts of approbation.

In short, my performance was crowned with success. There was only one individual in the theatre, who seemed not to participate in the general feeling of approval ; he sat with his elbow on the front of the box, and his head resting on his hand. Thus he remained, without any apparent change of position, from the commencement of the piece till the fall of the curtain. He seemed, as it were, annoyed by the surrounding tumult of approbation. This was Mirabeau. I felt that I could have given all the applause I had earned, for the suffrage of that one man, and there he sat sternly immovable. His presence marred my triumph. The cause of this apathy was afterwards explained to me.

Mirabeau had just published his "*Histoire Secrète de la Cour de Berlin.*" He had been sent to Prussia by the French government ; the object of his mission being to communicate to the cabinet of Versailles the events that transpired at the death of Frederick II. He accordingly collected a multiplicity of facts and anecdotes, which he

probably amplified from his own imagination. Having blended the whole with sarcastic observations, in which he did not spare the personages who figured at the court of Berlin, the ministers of the Prussian government, &c. he published to the world matters which ought to have been veiled in secrecy.

The publication called forth general reprehension; but in France, scandal will always insure the popularity of a book. Mirabeau's conduct excited the disapproval of Louis XVI. The sovereign, who was the more offended, inasmuch as Prince Henry had thrown himself on the hospitality of France, required the Parliament to issue a decree condemning the book, and checking its further circulation.

Whilst the proceedings on this matter were pending, Prince Henry, who used to go about Paris like a private individual, happened to pay a visit to the Palais de Justice, where he met M. Seguier. The latter was carrying under his arm Mirabeau's book, on which he had just made a report.

"Prince," said he, "showing the book, I have performed a task, with which I trust your highness will be satisfied."

"I am, sir," replied the Prince; "but it was

unnecessary to give so much importance to so contemptible a work. It is dirt which leaves no stain."

Without pronouncing any opinion on the justice or injustice of the measures adopted against Mirabeau, I may observe that I was gratified to learn that the stern ill humour which he had manifested in the theatre, was not excited by a disapproval of my performance. But for the knowledge of that fact, my triumph would have been incomplete.

Now a word or two about the author of "*Les Deux Pages*;" I saw him on the day following our triumphant first night. He cordially embraced me, and at the same time apologised for having at first felt any want of confidence in my talents. I replied that any other author would naturally have had the same apprehensions. We both launched into a strain of mutual compliment, and each strove to have the last word; but at length I found myself obliged to yield. After a short pause, the author said: "I have a message for you from Prince Henry. His highness has desired me to present to you this snuff-box, which belonged to the King his brother, for the Prince is of opinion that no one knows better how to use it than yourself. His highness directs me to assure you that your acting has fully verified an observation of Fre-

derick the Great himself: viz. that ‘feeling is the main-spring of every great effort.’ ”

The reader may imagine the pleasure I felt on receiving this gratifying message and present. The box was adorned by a beautifully painted miniature of the King, set round with diamonds.

I have not yet mentioned the name of the author of the “Deux Pages,” a name which is unknown to literature; and I wish I could discharge a debt of gratitude on my part by disclosing it. At the time the piece was brought out, Dezède’s name alone was made public; but he merely composed the music. Dezède, therefore, was not my author; neither was Sauvigné, as alleged by M. Grimm, who, like many other persons, was misinformed as to the fact. It was not Faure, as stated by MM. Etienne and Matinville, in their interesting work, entitled “L’Histoire du Théâtre Français pendant la Révolution.” But, I am not at liberty to name him, and must content myself with observing, that he was a man of high birth, and descended from one of the sovereign houses of Europe ¹.

¹ The author’s name was said to be Manteufel; though that name has the appearance of being fictitious.

CHAPTER XXII.

My reconciliation with Laharpe.—Performance of *Coriolanus*.—
 M. Champeenetz.—His epigrams.—Laharpe offended.—The
 Winter Vauxhall.—Superb illumination.—Deputation from the
Comédie Française.—Lottery.—Dispute between Laharpe and
 Champeenetz.—Amusing scene.—Madame de Sainte Ama-
 ranthe.—Her history.—My promised introduction to her.—
 Sum collected at the theatres of Paris for the benefit of the
 poor.—The money refused by the curés.—Charitable exertions
 of the ladies of Paris.—Curious custom.—The pretty *Quêteuse*.
 —My visits to the widow Carlin.—The distressed family.—
 Touching anecdote.—A generous revenge.

I ADJUSTED my little misunderstanding with Laharpe, and resolved never again to be offended by his irritable temper. He was welcome to be angry as often as he pleased, so long as each of his sallies of petulance should be the occasion of a renewal of intimacy like that on which my memory still so fondly dwells.

During the severe winter of 1783-84, we performed "*Coriolanus*" for the benefit of the poor.

Though we had a full house, the piece met with but a cold reception, and as none of Laharpe's works were ever known to escape the lash of sarcasm, "Coriolanus" formed no exception to the rule. M. de Champcenetz exercised his wit at the author's expense, in the following clever epigram :—

" Pour les pauvres, la Comédie
Joue une pauvre tragédie ;
C'est bien le cas, en vérité,
De l'applaudir par charité."

Here I take the liberty of using, or, perhaps, I should rather say abusing, that privilege of digression to which my readers are by this time tolerably accustomed. I must dwell for a moment on M. de Champcenetz.

I knew him well. He was a man whose chief occupation in life was making bon-mots, and whose favourite amusement was cracking jokes upon every body near him.

Every one has his hobby, and that chosen by M. de Champcenetz was the composition of epigrams. To this he was urged merely by a certain feeling of literary vanity, and without being actuated by any ill-natured motives, for he bore no one malice. His ambition was to be the gay Zoïlus of all who made any figure in the world of literature. No one knew better than M. de Champ-

cenetz how to make his satires tell, and the consequence was, that each party in the vulnerable community of literature sought to attach him to itself. It is an error to imagine that those who indulge in cutting sarcasm are shunned; I have ever found them, on the contrary, well received, and even courted. In society they perform the office of the shepherd's dog, biting all who stray beyond the right boundary; and act like a police for the correction of folly and vanity. M. de Champcenetz was a welcome visitor in all the best salons of Paris.

Nobody understood better than he did the philosophy of his calling, or succeeded better in augmenting his own reputation by diminishing that of others. What the world thought proper to admire through a prismatic medium, M. de Champcenetz immediately exhibited through the condensing power of a lens. Men of eminence are superior to the rest of the world only in the gross; but Champcenetz possessed the faculty of picking out their details. He could detect, at a single glance, the lowest level of a high renown, and the weakest point of a vigorous intellect. None could equal him in the facility of hitting off a caricature, or of exposing the ridiculous by means of a humorous sally. As to mediocrity, he never condescended to attack it: mediocrity is all of one stamp—it has

no projecting points for satire to lay hold of. Champeenetz, in his striking caricatures, applied his shadows only to those parts where there was too strong a glare of light, and his epigrams may be said to be smart and brilliant in proportion to the celebrity of their victims.

Laharpe, it is true, did not soar with eagle's wings, but he was as choleric as any less poetic bird, and the satire launched against his "*Coriolanus*" incensed him not a little. He sought an opportunity to tell M. de Champeenetz how much he was offended, and the opportunity speedily offered itself. In imitation of the *Comédie Française*, or rather of the *Comédie Italienne*, which was the first to set the example, every place of amusement in Paris gave a benefit to the poor. On one of these occasions Laharpe encountered his antagonist. It was at the Winter Vauxhall, which was then under the direction of a man of distinguished taste. On the evening in question there was a display of splendor never before witnessed. The four saloons were sumptuously decorated; the colonnade over the rotunda was illuminated by a most ingenious contrivance, by means of which a central light, not visible to the spectators, diffused streams of variegated radiance—blue, red, yellow, and white. The colonnade, thus lighted, looked like some fairy structure formed of suspended

vapors, so light and shadowy, that it seemed as though a single breath of air might annihilate them. But the rotunda—how shall I describe the rotunda? It was resplendent with that which constitutes the most attractive charm of every fête—with that which, with the best wishes, it is not always in the power of the directors of fêtes to give, viz. innumerable groupés of lovely women, whose beauty added lustre to the brilliant scene, and heightened the illusion of the fairy palace suggested by the effect of the colonnade.

The Comédie Française was represented at this fête by a deputation of several of the most admired actresses of our company, attended by three of our gentlemen. I had not the honour to form a part of the deputation, but I purchased a ticket, and attended the fête in company with a young artist of my acquaintance. We entered while they were engaged in drawing a lottery, in which the prizes consisted of trinkets, together with a variety of grotesque china figures, which, as they appeared, drew forth peals of laughter from the company. The ceremony consisted in placing five lots at a time upon the board, which were immediately drawn for. The orchestra then saluted the winners with a triumphal air, after which the ladies returned to their boxes, and cotillons, minuets, &c.

filled up the interval until the drawing was again resumed.

Having taken a few turns through the place, I was on the point of departing, when I heard two persons disputing, whose voices I thought were familiar to my ear. I inquired what was the matter, and soon learned that the altercation was between M. Laharpe and M. de Champcenetz. It appeared that the Marquis de Malseigne, a general officer of carabiniers, had just been declared the winner of a china figure, representing a shivering old man warming himself.

“What do you call this?” said he, holding it up to the view of the company.

“A Coriolanus!” replied a voice in the crowd.

All eyes were instantly directed to the spot from whence the voice had proceeded, and Laharpe was seen, as pale as death, shouldering his way through the crowd, until he arrived opposite the box of the Vicomte de Saint-Pons, whither M. de Champcenetz had taken refuge. Then, without the smallest consideration either for the Vicomte or the ladies who were of his party, Laharpe apostrophized his adversary without ceremony.

Perceiving Lassone in one of the boxes, in company with Mademoiselle Olivier, I made all the haste I could to get round along with my friend

the artist. We requested permission to enter the box, that we might observe what passed on the opposite side ; and it was really well worth seeing. Laharpe was at that moment not far distant from us, with his hands resting on the edge of the railing, and his head thrust forward, directly in front of M. de Champcenetz, whom he was addressing in an angry tone, and who, on his part, was preparing to reply. They looked to me like Punch and the Devil making grimaces at each other in a puppet-show. The public enjoyed the scene amazingly ; and though not announced in the bill, it was by no means the least entertaining part of the evening's amusement.

The epigrammatist, perceiving that his adversary had opened upon him in full cry, was determined not to be surpassed in the flowers of rhetoric. He seized the opportunity thus afforded him of giving a wider diffusion to the epigram I have quoted in a preceding page, which had hitherto been known only within a very limited circle. This manœuvre somewhat disconcerted the author of " *Coriolanus*," who began to perceive that he was amusing the company at his own expense, and at the same time affording M. de Champcenetz the gratification he most highly prized, viz. engrossing general attention, and quoting his own epigrams. Laharpe accordingly drew himself suddenly up with that

air of dignity which he knew so well how to assume when he chose, and the battle ended with a few words of smart attack and vigorous defence.

I know not whether the *au revoir* with which this sparring concluded, was followed up by any further consequences, but Laharpe took his departure immediately after. As for M. de Champcenetz, he still stuck to the field of battle, enjoying his double triumph of author and conqueror. I saw him going about, relating the story to those of his numerous acquaintance who did not understand the matter. After fluttering about in this way for some time, he returned at last to the box occupied by the Vicomte de Saint-Pons and the ladies. My attention was arrested by the attractions of the Vicomte's female companions, among whom I beheld such arms, hands, and waists, and caught glimpses of such lovely shoulders, as would have sufficed to adorn a more elegant place than a box at Vauxhall. Their faces, too, were all of a striking cast; one or two decidedly handsome, and the others characterized by a charming expression of naïveté. I took good care, however, not to betray my admiration in the hearing of Mademoiselle Olivier. Beauty is never satisfied with a divided homage; this is a principle of gallantry I have always scrupulously borne in mind. However, I was soon relieved by her quitting the box, and I

applied to my friend the artist, for information respecting the beauties on the opposite side. He was able to gratify my curiosity, and gave me the names of the ladies, among which that of Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe particularly caught my ear. Methought, however, I could discover, amid the brilliant mass of ribbons, feathers, and flowers, a fourth pretty face, and I asked my friend whether he had nothing to tell me about its owner.

"That fair damsel," replied he, "is at present a very inconsiderable personage, though it must be confessed she promises to create some sensation hereafter. In the mean time, I have nothing better to say of her than that she is a very pretty girl, and the daughter, as report goes, of the Vicomte de Saint-Pons."

"And her mother is . . . ?"

"Oh! Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe, of course."

"You appear well-informed," continued I; "and if these ladies are in any way connected with the world of fashion, I must confess I am somewhat surprised I do not know them."

"*Pends-toi, Crillon!*" said my friend. "Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe is sufficiently well known to the higher ranks of society. Her parties are not inferior to those given in the best houses in Paris. At the same time, I do not wonder at your not knowing her, seeing that for the last two years

she has been but little in Paris. The fair ladies who accompany her are the owners of chateaux in Cercy, where Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe herself possesses an elegant country residence.”

I had adjusted my opera-glass, for the purpose of taking a good look at Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe, when at that instant the dancing ceased, and, as the last lottery was about to be drawn, the company quitted their seats to walk up and down the lobbies, and the box, at which I was gazing, was suddenly vacated. While the rest of the company were moving from place to place, I sat and listened to my neighbour, who was eager to tell me all he knew of a woman who may be said to have made some figure in her time.

“Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe was a young lady of quality, of the family of D’Arpajon. She had been brought up under the care of a mother, whose principles were possibly not the most rigid, as far as she herself was concerned, but who, as is usual in such cases, kept a most vigilant watch over her daughter, restraining her from the enjoyment of even innocent pleasures.

“But in spite of the good intentions of mamma, the young lady made but an ungrateful return for all her maternal caution; and the town of Besançon, in which the two ladies resided, became the scene of an adventure, which furnished a fort-

night's gossip to the provincial scandal-mongers. In spite of, or perhaps it may be said, because of the noise which this little affair excited in Besançon, an aspirant to the hand of Mademoiselle soon presented himself. There is strong reason to suspect that this marriage was an act of reparation, although the good folks of the neighbourhood affected most maliciously to discredit this supposition, thereby securing for themselves two themes for scandal instead of one. However this may be, the young lady and her lover quitted the place, and shortly after, the *Sieur de Sainte-Amaranthe*, captain of cavalry, presented himself in Paris with the reputation of a man of courage acquired by himself, of a man of wealth inherited from his father (a *receiver-general*), and now the favoured possessor of two new treasures, the virtue and beauty of his wife.

“*M. de Sainte-Amaranthe* being endowed with a certain share of enthusiasm, continued in love with his lady for two whole months. This was a good deal even for him, but it was a thing quite unexampled in a cavalry captain at that time. An uninterrupted matrimonial fidelity of two months, in the year 1760, was sure to excite ridicule. The captain's friends rallied him on the subject, and he gave it up. Finding persua-

sion unavailing, to restrain his libertinism Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe had recourse to reproaches, which, however, did not mend the matter, for her husband deserted her. Though possessed of a large fortune, he had imbibed tastes, for the gratification of which twice the amount of his resources would not have sufficed. He made a bad selection of friends, and those friends led him into indiscretion and infidelities, until at length he contrived to ruin himself. Being destitute of the sort of resolution which might have led him to blow out the small portion of brains he possessed, he quitted France, repaired to Spain, and ended his career at Madrid in the oddest way imaginable. He engaged himself as a hackney coachman, thus exchanging the command of a troop of horse for the control of a pair.

“Meanwhile, what could his poor wife do, but endeavour to console herself? and, thanks to the tender attentions of the Prince de Conti, she succeeded. The Prince did his best to induce her to forget the wrongs of love, and contrived, at least, to compensate her for those of fortune.

“Since the Prince’s death, and perhaps for some time before, (I give the story in my companion’s own words,) Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe has been her own mistress. But she has a daughter,

and on her account, makes a prudent use of the liberty she has so dearly purchased. Imagine Ninon a widow, but imagine Ninon also a mother, and you may then form a just conception of Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe. Though she may not be precisely what is termed beautiful, still she knows how to render herself very attractive; and if she be no longer young, she has attained that age when the art of making the most of the graces which remain, surpasses, perhaps, the power of charms which, though youthful and natural, are often insipid. In the talent of dressing to the best advantage, Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe is a first rate artist. On her return to Paris, she gave card-parties, at which pretty deep play was carried on; for it was her object to assemble around her a large circle of society, and she knew that cards are a sort of covering for all kinds of negociations. Persons of rank, both male and female, artists and authors, all assemble in the drawing-room of Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe. Thus play is, with *her*, the means, and not the end. Those who do not visit her may traduce her, but those who know her, admire her. • She is one of those rare women, who must be seen to be understood, and of whom one never sees enough. In fine, my dear Fleury, to conclude with

the touch of a painter, though this sketch may have the air of being flattered, yet I can assure you that it is no more than a fair likeness."

"Which you will enable me to compare with the original?" said I eagerly.

"I will make known your wish, if you desire it, but I cannot undertake to promise you a favorable answer. With all her good qualities, madame has sometimes a mode of appreciating people peculiar to herself; and only those who happen to take her fancy"

"A fair challenge!" exclaimed I, interrupting my companion, who, piqued at my vanity, was about to reply, when I begged him to accompany me to the Rotunda. I purposed to use the pretext of complimenting M. Champcenetz on his triumph, in the hope of bringing about an introduction to the lady.

I had, however, reckoned too confidently on my usual good luck. When we entered the Rotunda, the ladies were gone, and we learned, on inquiry, that M. de Champcenetz had accompanied them. I must own I envied the good fortune of that caustic personage; for the interest I felt for Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe was excited by an attraction which I could not account for. My friend perceived the disappointment I

felt, and protested at parting, that he would do all in his power to get me admitted among the number of the elect.

The fête at Vauxhall did not produce as much as was expected, the expenses having absorbed a large portion of the receipts. The total sum, however, collected at the different theatres, for the relief of the poor, amounted to no less than 36,679 livres. Yet,—will it be believed? when we presented ourselves to the curés of our respective parishes to offer the money, we were told that they had received orders not to take it. Monseigneur de Beaumont, the zealous protector of Madame Lacaille, of the Théâtre Italien, anticipating the proceedings of the theatrical managers, had resolved that the money should be delivered to the lieutenant of police, from whose hands alone the curés could touch it without scandal. Only think of money for the use of the poor being refused because it came from actors! The alms of the players required to be purified by passing through the kennels of the police! Could anything be imagined more absurd than this hypocrisy? It must be observed, too, that during the performance of these ceremonies, dozens of poor famishing creatures were breathing their last on their beds of straw! The bigotted priests knew

not that the piece of copper given to the poor man to-day, avails more than the piece of silver that may be promised him on the morrow.

The charitable feeling evinced by the inhabitants of Paris on this occasion, cannot be too highly praised. All classes of society joined in the good work of succouring the unfortunate ; even artisans laid by a portion of their earnings to contribute to the common stock of charity. It always happens in Paris, whenever there is a general movement among the people, whenever one common motive impels the mass, that it exhibits itself in an *outré* or exaggerated aspect, however exalted may be its object. What a sight it was to see the ladies that winter, all converted into *hirondelles de carême*, and going about from house to house soliciting alms. They wore what were then termed *toilettes de quête*, the most becoming dress imaginable ; and thus attired, a pretty woman could not fail to melt the hardest heart to charity. At home their industry was exercised in making purses to receive the contributions of the charitable. On these purses were embroidered flowers, mottoes, garlands, and sometimes even winged cupids. Charity assumed the most attractive trappings, and decked herself out in the gayest colours. Every heart was softened ; every

hand was opened. This zeal, so becoming to the fair devotees, these appeals so gracefully embellished, failed not to produce their natural fruit, and many families were rescued from starvation.

In the midst of all this excitement, there was one small corner of the picture which, though but little remarked, was well worthy the attention of the moralist; possibly it secured my notice only by the results to which it led. The young girls belonging to some of the districts, which might be classed as holding a sort of middle rank between the *quartiers nobles* and the *quartiers bourgeois*, formed themselves into a kind of benevolent association. With the first rays of the morning's light might be seen a swarm of little creatures, from ten to twelve years of age, issuing from every corner of the street, and running with cries of joy towards some house which had been previously selected by the merry troop. In general the largest *porte-cochère* was made choice of. A table was soon set up, and covered with a fringed cloth. On it they placed a silver plate, into which they threw a few pieces of silver, the savings of their pocket-money, by way of making a beginning, or *pour parer la marchandise*, as it was styled. Then they commenced operations, and when they saw any one pass whose countenance bespoke good-nature, or whose appearance denoted easy circum-

stances, one of the girls, deputed by the rest, immediately went forward, and solicited alms for the poor of the district. Their genteel and engaging manners, enabled them to succeed in collecting very respectable sums of money ; and with the womanly tact which developes itself, even at their early age, they no sooner saw any one advancing, than they selected as their deputy that individual of the pretty groupe, whom they judged best calculated to succeed. The youngest and most frolicsome were sent to pull the sexagenarian by the skirt of the coat, while the tallest made her demure courtesy to the man of forty ; the most simply dressed presented the plate to dames of quality ; and no lady of a certain age was ever accosted, but by the very plainest girl of the party. Their sole object being to collect money for the poor, all rivalry gave place to the one feeling of benevolence, and the selection of the *quêteuses* was decided by the most impartial justice, and with the best judgment.

Since the death of our poor friend Carlin, I had been in the habit of paying frequent visits to his widow. The part of the town in which she resided was at a considerable distance from our Faubourg Saint-Germain ; but, when the weather was fine, the walk did not alarm me, and I had often the happiness, on my way thither, of looking

at a most beautiful girl, who, during the interval of distress which I have just been describing, had taken upon herself the task of a *quêteuse*. Conceive an oval-formed face, with features like those of a Grecian nymph, and eyes beaming with the most enchanting expression, presenting, as it were, a union of smiles and tears. I cannot tell what might be her age, but her pensive look was older than her smile. She was at that period of life when the woman just emerges from girlhood. Add to all this a sylph-like form, the graces of which were heightened, not concealed, by a black mantilla, tastefully draped on her shoulders, and falling in silken folds below her waist. If any one could have looked, unmoved, upon that angelic face, shaded by its long clustering ringlets, or could have listened with indifference to the melodious accents which breathed forth the touching appeal, "*Pour nos pauvres, s'il vous plait,*" I confess I could not. I believe I should have thrown into the plate all that I was worth in the world, if I had had it about me.

Such was the charming vision I encountered whenever I directed my steps towards the house of Madame Carlin. To meet my little petitioner was to me a high source of pleasure, and I must confess that I did ~~not~~ fully deserve the gratitude expressed to me for my attentions to the widow of

our harlequin. That the charming little being I have just been describing was endowed with generosity of heart, no less than with beauty of person, the following anecdote will show.

A gold lace maker, with a wife and family, was thrown out of work, and was totally destitute, during the severity of the long and rigorous winter. After suffering great distress, he succeeded in getting some employment among the vessels in the river. But this sort of labour, to which he was unaccustomed, unfortunately proved too much for his strength; and one morning, as he rose to go to his work, he was overcome with a fit of exhaustion, and fell back on the bed on which his wife had already lain for two months, disabled by illness. He had three children, two of them boys of a very tender age, and a daughter twelve or thirteen years old. As long as the poor fellow was able to work, the daughter had attended on her mother, and taken charge of her little brothers, but when she beheld her father stretched upon a bed of sickness, she felt that, young as she was, the support of the family must devolve upon her.

With a promptness and energy which marked her character, before she repaired in search of employment, she applied to the *Bureau de Charité* of the parish in which she lived, hoping to obtain therefrom the means of satisfying the first wants

of her parents and brothers. The person to whom she addressed herself made a memorandum in a book, as a preliminary step to the required formalities, and then informed her that the case would be taken into consideration. Overwhelmed with disappointment and despair, the poor girl hastened from the *bureau*; her resolution was instantly taken—she determined to beg.

Hurrying from a district in which she was known, she directed her steps towards the faubourg Saint-Jacques; there she summoned up sufficient courage to sue for charity. Her looks were interesting and prepossessing, and her dress, though exceedingly plain, being such as she had put on to make a decent appearance at the *Bureau de Charité*, induced those persons to whom she applied to discredit her piteous tale. She was repulsed by the rich; and the poor of the neighbourhood, soon regarding her as a trespasser on their domains, called her, in derision, "*demoiselle*," and told her to go and sell her fine clothes, if she were really in want. These taunts were followed by less equivocal demonstrations; they pelted her with all the dirt they could contrive to gather from the frozen ground. Terrified almost to death, and crying bitterly, the poor child fled from her persecutors, and ran home. As soon as she reached the door, the piercing accents of her little brothers

crying for bread struck upon her ears. On entering, she beheld her father struggling with all the strength of his exhausted frame to support his fainting wife. The little boys, turning their pale faces towards their sister, called for bread, while the father exclaimed, "Behold your mother dying of hunger!"

In the depth of her anguish a sudden thought crossed the mind of the poor girl: "Presently," said she, "presently; you shall have some." Having uttered these words, she rushed down stairs, half distracted, yet firm in her resolution. She ran from street to street, and from one baker's shop to another, until at last she came to one in which there was no person in attendance. Then summoning all the courage, or rather all the desperation, necessary for the commission of a theft, she entered, snatched up a loaf, and fled. Alas! the act was not unobserved; she had been seen from the back-shop by the baker, who ran out and raised a cry after her. Finding herself pursued, she redoubled her speed. Sustained by the thought of bearing succour to her family, so long as she retained her hold of the precious booty, none could have overtaken her; but at length a man, who had joined in the pursuit, wrested the loaf from her grasp, and in an instant she stopped, helpless and unresisting. When conducted to the

Commissaire for examination, she turned her eyes imploringly to the crowd by whom she was surrounded, as if seeking to discover some compassionate heart capable of sympathizing in the feelings with which her own was bursting. At length she seemed to have found what she so anxiously sought, and she fixed her bewildered eyes on an object before her. It was the face of a young girl, beaming with an expression of intense sympathy, and regarding her with a benevolent smile, which seemed to tell her that her feelings were understood. Eagerly leaning forward, she whispered the words, "Rue du Four, numéro 10; my father, mother, and little brothers!" in an instant she was dragged from the spot.

But let us now return, for a moment, to the dwelling of the wretched family. The mother had come to herself; the husband was endeavouring to comfort her, and the little boys were cheering her with the assurance—"we shall soon have some bread to eat!" Alas! an hour, a whole weary hour had passed away! Anxiously did they listen for every sound; often and often did the children go to the door to watch, but no sister appeared! At length, approaching footsteps are heard, a cry of anxious hope bursts at once from the wretched groupe; . . . they listen again, . . . alas! their hope has fled! . . . the ear of the de-

solate and the hungry is exquisitely keen. . . . It is not the footstep of her they so anxiously expect! . . . No! but it was a ministering angel, in the person of my pretty *quêteuse*, who brought to the famishing family a basket of provisions! "Your daughter will not be home to-day," said she. "We have given her work at our house; but she sends some food to relieve your hunger, and presently you will have some wood to kindle a fire," and as she uttered these words, she slipped some money into the hand of the father.

The benedictions that were heaped upon her by the poor family may be easily imagined. "Who are you? . . . Whence do you come? . . . Where is my daughter? . . . my sister?" were questions which all eagerly uttered with one voice.

Their benefactress, with ready invention, gave some explanation, with which the poor people were satisfied. She then hurried home, but not to the residence of her mother, who was at that time absent from town, but to the house of a relative, a very pious lady, to whom she was on a visit. She was severely reprimanded; first, for having escaped from the nurse, under whose care she was at the moment when she lent ear to the whispered supplications of the poor little prisoner; and next, because she had presumed to take a step which was declared to be at once extraordinary

and unbecoming. The act for which she was thus reproved, was one which could only have been prompted by the impulses of an ardent and generous heart. To obtain the means of relieving the wants of the destitute family, the little *quétuse* had sold her superb head of hair! those luxuriant tresses which, when freed from the combs which confined them, reached nearly to the ground.

But, it may be asked, how could such an idea enter her mind? It was suggested thus. A hair-dresser, whose shop she was frequently in the habit of passing, had sometimes said, looking wistfully at her beautiful ringlets, "I would willingly give a louis-d'or for that head of hair." These remarks flattered her vanity, and she felt no inclination to part with her luxuriant tresses, until her heart prompted her to relieve the distress of the suffering family. Her mother, had she been in town, would readily have supplied her with the means of gratifying her benevolent feeling; but to ask her guardian for money she knew would be useless. In this dilemma, she thought of the hair-dresser's offer of the louis-d'or. She went to his shop, and proposed to sell him the hair which he had so frequently admired. The man was filled with astonishment, and refused to cut off the hair,

being fearful of incurring the censure of her friends. But the girl herself having seized the scissors and cut out a large handful of beautiful curls, the hair-dresser scrupled not to complete the sacrifice. He then inquired what had induced her to form so extraordinary a resolution. On learning the object to which she intended to apply the money, he condemned her charitable enthusiasm, and that she might be the more sure of remembering the lesson, he gave her only fifteen francs for her hair, instead of the promised louis-d'or.

I will not longer detain my reader with the details of the efforts and the sacrifices made by this amiable girl for the relief of her protégés. I have already dwelt on this little episode longer than I should have done, however much I felt interested in it; but it is, as I before hinted, connected in a singular way with my subsequent adventures. I shall therefore merely add, that I did not become acquainted with all the circumstances of the above story until some time after they occurred; but one day on my way to visit Madame Carlin, I missed my pretty little friend. On inquiry, I learned from her young companions the particulars of the touching story I have above related. Amélie, for that was her name, had gone back to her mother's house, and would not be able to rejoin them for

some time, being, as they added, sadly disfigured by the loss of her hair.

Meantime my friend, the artist, had not failed to speak of me to Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe, and I must confess I was rather mortified at hearing that he had not obtained her permission to introduce me. It is annoying at any time to be disappointed in what one has set one's heart on, but to have one's pride humbled into the bargain, is doubly unpleasant. I had, as yet, scarcely established a reputation, and immediately concluded that I was not sufficiently distinguished to obtain admission to the lady's parties. This thought inspired me with any thing but grateful feelings towards her. When once a man's talents are acknowledged by the public, should he by chance find himself slighted by any individual, he consoles himself by shrugging up his shoulders, and pitying the bad taste which cannot appreciate his merits; but so long as he himself is the only person to perceive those merits, he feels sorely stung when any one else cannot discern the brilliant light that is hidden under the bushel. Now that I have shaken off some of the vanities of the world, I will confess that this was actually my case in reference to Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe; and I would have given a good deal at the moment for an opportunity to make the lady

sensible of the egregious mistake she had committed.

That opportunity at length arrived; yet, in spite of my vengeful feelings, I used it generously. It was at the fifty-first representation of the "Marriage of Figaro," and on the occasion of Mademoiselle Emilie Contat's first appearance. The crowd was tremendous; the lobbies were absolutely choked up, and people were pushing and pressing against each other in fearful confusion. I had gone round to the front of the house to explain some mistake regarding a box which had been entered in a wrong name, and, having settled that matter, was returning, working my way through the crowd in the best way I could. Suddenly a cry of distress was uttered by some one near me. It was a female voice. Turning my head quickly in the direction of the sound, I saw a lady with uplifted hands and arms, apparently in an agony of terror or distress. I succeeded in making my way to her, and by dint of considerable exertion I rescued a very pretty woman from her unpleasant position in the thickest part of the crowd.

"Oh! sir," she exclaimed, in a tone of intense anxiety, "they have separated me from my daughter! . . . and M. le Vicomte de Saint-Pons, who was with us." . . .

A triumphant smile passed over my features; I know not how the lady interpreted it.

“Have you seen her, sir? . . . Have you seen my daughter? . . . Do you know the Vicomte?” . . .

“I have the honour to know him, madame,” said I; “he will soon make his way up to us; the crowd is already getting thinner. In the mean time, madame, I will remain beside you, and shall feel only too happy if I am able to render myself in any way serviceable to Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe.”

“To whom, sir, am I indebted for . . . ?”

“Excuse me, madame,” said I; “I am delighted to have the opportunity of serving you, but I must refrain from giving you a name which may injure me in your estimation.”

“Mamma! mamma!” cried a little girl, who had just pierced her way through the crowd, and who came running out of breath to throw herself into the arms of the lady.

“Thank this gentleman, my love,” said her mother, embracing her.

At these words she turned to me, and we recognised each other at a glance. It was my lovely little *quêteuse*! She gave me a smile of inimitable sweetness, then, turning to her mother, she said—

“I know this gentleman, mamma; he is very good, and very generous.”

“Mademoiselle,” said I, observing the astonishment expressed on the lady’s countenance, “will explain to you the circumstances under which we have become acquainted.” Then hastily taking a respectful leave, I was still further gratified by hearing the Vicomte de Saint-Pons, as he made his way up towards us, saluting me with a friendly “Bon soir, Fleury !”

My reader will readily believe that I did not throw away the advantage I had gained by this little incident, and he therefore must not be surprised to find me, in the year 1789, on the footing of an old acquaintance in the house of Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Revolutionary troubles.—Introduction of clubs in France.—Abuse of the innovation.—Altered tone of conversation in the drawing-rooms of Paris.—Chénier's tragedy of Charles IX.—Dissension among the performers of the Comédie Française.—Theatrical dynasty.—Preference of the tragedian to the comedian.—Talma.—He receives the part of Charles IX. from the hands of Chénier.—His sublime representation of the character.—The performance of Charles IX. prohibited.—Reappearance of Larive.—Intercession of the Abbé Gouttes.—Mirabeau in 1790.

I SHALL have occasion, by-and-by, to return to Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe; for, at the commencement of our political troubles, and when the spirit of the revolution broke forth in its fierce Saturnalia, her's was the friendly house to which I most frequently resorted. Mingling with the individuals eminent for their rank or talents, who assembled beneath her roof, during those stirring times, I gathered information on current events,

and armed myself with arguments, to enable me to maintain my ground against the blind enthusiasts and interested advocates of the movement, with which the green-room of the Comédie Française then abounded.

Yes; not even our literary green-room was exempt from the invasion of politics. The then neglected saints of the dramatic calendar, whose festivals were interrupted until the establishment of the empire, Thalia and Melpomene, wept to see their sacred altars profaned by the party brochures of the day, and their venerable sanctuary transformed into a political club.

What delightful things were those clubs at their commencement! The term was new to French ears, and our ladies loved to pronounce it because it was foreign. The meetings themselves too were new and foreign, and for that reason they were eagerly adopted. Clubs became quite the rage, and they gave renewed brilliancy to our *soirées*, whose lustre was beginning to be dimmed. They furnished new winter-quarters for fashionable conversation, which was dying of decline—not for want of aliment, but because its tone, which had been adopted under Louis XIV., had lasted through three whole reigns. It therefore required renovation. Yet, in changing the form of things, there is always a risk of changing their nature;

and so it happened, that Parisian conversation, that lively queen of the drawing-room, was soon converted into a formal prude, who talked of nothing but principles, abuses, and constitutions. From that moment the character of the club was changed; it aimed at constituting itself a sort of tribunal of public opinion, and to justify this pretension, it enlisted under its banners that spirit of opposition which is innate with the Parisians. Then it was that criticism established *her* club, and appointed her presidents, her councillors, and her orators; wrote out her long-winded cases, spoke for hours at a time, inscribed on her golden tablets the names of those who had won her approval, and promised high renown to the boldest of her sons.

At this period the tragedy of "Charles IX." appeared on the scene. What a change had taken place since the time when I was at Ferney playing tricks with Voltaire's wig. That venerable innovator then wrote to Saurin as follows: "The time will come when we shall introduce popes upon the stage, as the Greeks represented their Atreuses and their Thyestes, to render them odious. The time will come when the massacre of St. Bartholomew will be made the subject of a tragedy."

That time, which Voltaire's prophetic imagination pictured at a remote distance among

future generations, arrived eleven years after his death; Chénier produced his "Charles IX. ou l'Ecole des Rois." The appearance of this tragedy became the signal for a series of conflicts, persecutions, and disasters, which for a long time disturbed the old sanctuary of Molière and Corneille. At that period the members of the dramatic company were, for the most part, too young. With the exception of Molé, Dazincour, and Dugazon, I was myself the father of the stage, and I had not then attained my fortieth year. Of the thirty-six performers composing our company of *sociétaires*, nine were young, pretty women, who, without any injustice, might have continued in their noviciate for some years to come. Such a company could not be expected to be of much importance in public opinion. What we wanted was one of those great actors, who are in themselves worth a whole troop, and who confer dignity on the company to which they belong: one of those men, whom the public recognise as monarchs of the histrionic art, and whose genius extinguishes all second-rate rivals, and absorbs all paltry jealousies. By the side of a superior genius of this kind, talents of a lower order cease to regard each other with watchful envy. Just as it is with children, who are continually measuring height one with another, when all are nearly of a size;

but let a big boy come amongst them, and their desire of overtopping each other is at an end. We had, it is true, our Molé and our Contat, unquestionably performers of the very first order; but it is a remarkable fact, that the theatrical sceptre has not hitherto been wielded by any but a tragic actor. What can be the cause of this? Is it that the grandeur of tragedy, and the vast expansion of feeling required for its due delineation, produce a sort of overawing impression on the public mind? Or is it that the difficulty of separating the actor altogether from his part, causes him to be invested with a portion of the exalted and poetic nature of the characters he personates? These are questions which I will not attempt to decide; but certain it is, that the tragedian takes a higher rank in his art than the comedian; and accordingly, Baron, Quinault, Lekain, and Brizard, were the princes of a sort of theatrical dynasty. Whilst France was dashing to pieces the diadem of her kings, we actors were searching among ourselves for the brow worthy to wear our theatrical crown. Though no one laid claim to the exclusive right of sovereignty, yet there were several who conceived themselves entitled to have a share of it. The Comédie Française, in the year 1789, was a regency without a minority.

Yet he, whose full maturity this high honour awaited, was there. He over whose cradle the Muse of Tragedy had hung, breathing her sublime inspirations into his infant soul—Talma was among us, though we knew him not. Dugazon, gifted with more penetration than the rest of us, early perceived the latent germs of genius in the future Roscius.

How frequently have I and Mademoiselle Contat burned with rage and disappointment to see our elders, wielding the right of seniority, consign us to the obscurest corners of the *répertoire*; but I cannot deny, that the right of seniority, so odious to me in 1778, became more tolerable in proportion as I advanced in professional rank. I may appeal to Talma himself, who was then so eager to sacrifice all these regulations, as being tainted with theatrical feudalism. Will he not also acknowledge that, some years later, he found them very convenient to appeal to?

Being, then, a partisan of the established order of things, I joined the party of Dazincour, Contat, Raucour, and others, while Talma opposed us, supported by Dugazon and Madame Vestris. The remainder of the company was divided between us, though some were not very constant to either party. The majority fluctuated from one side to

the other; he who was against us yesterday might join us to-morrow, while some of our supporters in their turn passed over to the enemy's camp.

Talma received from the hands of Chénier the part of Charles IX. Some biographers have alleged that he had the offer of the part only because Saint-Fal declined it, not thinking it worthy of his talents. This may be said to be partly true, and partly untrue. The character of Charles IX. was, in fact, first offered by the author to Saint-Fal, who declined it on the ground that he did not feel his powers equal to it; and in mentioning Talma as his substitute, he neither thought he was paying a bad compliment to the young tragedian, nor offering a *pis-aller* to the author. The selection made by Saint-Fal was unanimously approved of by all our company. We had already witnessed our young comrade's personation of the part of *Séide*, and, in spite of the inequalities of his performance and the defects of his diction, he gave evidence of that command of the varied emotions of the Tragic Muse, which are the best criterion of an actor's capabilities. We were well aware of the importance of the principal part, in a piece which might be termed the *va-tout* of the whole season.

The tragedy of "Charles IX." represented the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, and introduced a

cardinal upon the stage. This was a daring attempt! Such a piece as Voltaire did not expect could be played for a century after his death, was actually brought out during the existence of the States-General, at a time when the public mind was in a ferment, and when it was evident that twenty thousand spectators would throng to the Comédie Française with transports of enthusiasm, and night after night, fill the benches of our *parterre*. Under these circumstances, the part of Charles IX. could not be looked upon as a *pis-aller*.

On the contrary, the part was an important one;—one which could not fail to establish the reputation of an actor, whose intellectual and physical capabilities should fit him to perform it. We knew that we were entrusting to Talma's hands the whole destiny of an author, and we believed that he would give us a good account of the trust reposed in him.

We did not certainly anticipate that the young tragedian would have produced the effect he did in this part. We had formed no idea of the sublime effect he was capable of producing by his expressive features, and his eloquent pantomime. After being bowed down with remorse, and his face covered with the folds of the royal mantle, he suddenly raised himself up from his attitude of contri-

tion:—then surveying with looks of terror, him who invoked imprecations on his head, he shrank back convulsively, as if shaking off the drops of blood which had fallen upon him from his slaughtered subjects. The sublimity of Talma's conception of this scene, filled us with no less astonishment than admiration. But every great actor must rely in some degree on the inspiration of the moment. Great effects are often produced on the stage without premeditation, and, in other instances, effects will fail in spite of the most studied preparation. We knew that there were many points in the character of Charles IX. which must render it a prize to an actor of genius.

Certain dramatic biographers have asserted that the *sociétaires*, actuated by a base feeling of jealousy, erased the tragedy of "Charles IX." from the *répertoire*, with the view of checking the great success of young Talma. This is another misrepresentation. The performance of the piece was interrupted by order of the gentleman of the bed-chamber. The bishops feared the influence which might be produced on the public mind, by a work which they viewed as directed against the priesthood: they accordingly solicited the court to forbid the representation of the "Ecole des Rois," and Louis XVI. granted their request. It would have been most ill-advised on our part to have

interrupted the progress of a piece, which drew prodigiously crowded houses. "Charles IX." brought us as rich a harvest as the "Marriage of Figaro."

Nothing can be more absurd than to suppose the *sociétaires* wished to deprive Talma of the only part, in which he could display his fine talents. The real error committed by the *sociétaires*, though it has never been charged against us, was the influence we employed to bring about the re-appearance of Larive. I say this, be it observed, not from any intention to depreciate Larive's talent; but I must confess, that the spirit in which he was brought forward, had reference, not so much to his merits, as to the counter-influence it would secure to our party. With the help of the retired tragedian, we sought to produce in our little theatrical community, the grand effect which politicians style the *balance of power*. We omitted, however, one important consideration, namely, that systems should be adopted to the times; and the consequence was, that we continued to go on in the old mistaken track. In calling forth Larive, that he might oppose the despotism of old rules to the young tyranny with which we were threatened, we failed to observe the sufficiently obvious fact, that our great national change must bring about a dramatic *change*;

and that our actors of the past age must imbue themselves with the spirit of the present. Larive returned with his regular and harmonious style; but the public taste required an entirely new manner—full of fire and fitful passion. Larive had, as it were, acquired his talent by rote; but the talent which the public now sought for, was one of a more off-hand kind,—one which was constantly forcing its way into new and unbeaten tracks. The search after novelty was the moving spirit of the age; it was the impulse which governed the march of politics, science, and the arts, and to this impulse the stage must needs yield in turn. In this state of things, the popular taste called for an essentially clever actor, untrammelled by rules. To bring forward Larive, was like retrograding into bygone times; the revival of such an actor was in fact tantamount to the restoration of the titles of nobility. Larive was a theatrical Montmorency, an actor for the aristocracy; Talma was the actor of a revolutionized people.

Larive, who during his retirement had turned his mind to religious contemplation, at first declined all our proposals for his re-appearance, but Desesarts suggested to us a mode of overcoming his scruples. Larive had forsworn the theatre in favour of the church, and, singularly enough, the church became eventually the means of restoring

him to the theatre. He had contracted an intimacy with the Abbé Gouttes, vicar of the parish in which he resided. The Abbé, who had obtained a great ascendancy over Larive's mind, was precisely the mediator we wanted; for nobody knew better how to accommodate the spirit of his profession to passing circumstances. The Abbé Gouttes was eminently skilled in the art of combining things of totally opposite qualities, without exciting any angry effervescence between the discordant members of the union. Like *Frosine*, in the "Avare," he would have contrived even to marry the republic of Venice to the Grand Turk. At a later period of his life, I have been told, he might be seen, still faithful to his character, offering consolation to the sick and the dying, in his uniform of the National Guard, and carrying to them the sacred host in his cartouch-box!

At the time when we opened our negotiations with the Abbé, he was president of the National Assembly. The deputation appointed to wait upon him, met with a most satisfactory reception. He at once entered into our views. Being fully imbued with the then prevalent opinions, our representatives found little difficulty in convincing him that it would be important to the assembly, to avoid the reproach of viewing

with indifference the decline of the national drama. The consequence of his conviction of the value of their representations was, that he went to Larive, and exhorted him, with all the eloquence of which he was master, to lend his talents to the restoration of a theatre, which was more than ever likely to deserve its title of Théâtre Français.

Larive, of course, yielded to such an appeal, and accordingly re-appeared in the part of *Œdipus*. Never was there a more brilliant triumph; the resurrection of Le Kain himself could not have produced a greater effect. All the old admirers of tragedy, who had latterly deserted the theatre, thronged to it again to see their favourite actor. The house was filled to overflowing; even the *coulisses* were crowded. Larive surpassed himself, and received tremendous applause, to which no one contributed more than the Abbé Gouttes, who was conspicuously placed in one of the state boxes. He had made arrangements for being relieved that evening of his duties at the National Assembly, in order to witness his friend's triumph, which took place in May, 1790, and produced all the beneficial effects we had anticipated.

His success continued unabated. It was generally circulated that it was the President of the National Assembly, who had brought him back to

the stage. Nobody thought, therefore, of opposing a triumph which was tinged with a hue of patriotism. But it was determined to raise, by analogous means, the interdict from "Charles IX.," and to counterbalance the influence of the President, by that of the ruler of the National Assembly. In short, for the Abbé Gouttes they gave us Mirabeau.

Mirabeau! what reputation, what popularity were his in 1790! Those who never saw Mirabeau, those who did not live in Parisian society at that period, can form no conception of the effect of his all-powerful name. Mirabeau was the first and the last reason for everything. He could do anything, even bring chicory-coffee¹ into fashion; and, at the period of which I am now speaking, at the head of a theatrical intrigue. But where was he not to be found? He was the national factotum, the atlas of the movement. The King trembled before him, the Queen feared him, the nobles hated him, and the Assembly of Representatives obeyed him; while, at the same time, he was adored by the women, admired by the men, and applauded even in the streets. When

¹ Mirabeau recommended the use of chicory in France. He eulogised that root both in speech and in writing. He first made trial of it in the Grand Duchy of Brunswick, where it was extensively cultivated; and he was convinced that it might be rendered a profitable object of commerce.

he showed himself at the Comédie Française, modestly seated in the second tier, the *parterre*, eager to offer him the incense of flattery, forced him to come down in triumph to the first tier. But what could not Mirabeau command? At the National Assembly, at Versailles, at the theatre, deputies, princes, and secretaries, looked like so many humble tenants making their obeisances to the lord of the manor. I have seen him in the tribune, on one of the assembly's stormy days, firm and unbending, like a sturdy oak deeply-rooted in the soil. There he stood, with his head erect and chest expanded, looking like master of everything around him, and silencing his adversaries by the force of his eloquent invective. There was a charm—a fascination—in every word that fell from him. It seemed as if his voice would rend the vaulted roof; and the boundaries of the chamber appeared scarcely to afford sufficient scope for his action.

Whilst on the subject of Mirabeau, I feel half inclined to relate an amusing anecdote of him; but as it would in some degree derange the plan I have traced out, I will defer it until I come to the place where I first heard it. I shall, therefore, before proceeding to give an account of

what we used to call at the theatre the “Interludes of Charles IX.” pause, and refresh myself in a drawing-room, to which my inclination strongly attracts me.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe by candle-light.—Her daughter Emilie.—Second-hand love.—Horse-races and ass-races.—Novel mode of election to the Academy of Painting.—Queen Marie-Antoinette and the Count d'Artois.—The gold thistle.—Paris in miniature.—The Marquis de Condorcet.—His ideas on human perfectibility.—M. de Champeenetz.—Count de Tilly.—Prophetic dreams.—Visions of a new world.—The Chevalier Richard.—His mania for collecting portraits.—Curious researches.—Charlotte Corday.—Her genealogy traced.—She is proved to have been the grand-niece of Corneille.

WHAT a singular, and yet what a charming woman, was Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe! Her features were lively, animated, and varying in their expression to such a degree, that my old friend the artist could never succeed in catching a good likeness of her. On being reproached with this failure by Gossec, the composer of the fine choruses in "*Athalie*:"—"How can I help it?" was his reply; "the lady's face is always running up and down the gamut!" Sometimes Madame

de Sainte-Amaranthe looked forty years old, at others thirty, and very often she would seem scarce twenty. I found out the cause of this curious variation by dint of a close observation of the persons and things around her. I was sure to perceive that some buhl ornament had been damaged, some new guest had been admitted, some old friend had deserted, or, as was frequently the case at that time, some new *brochure*, of opposite opinions to her's, had been trampled under her feet. Her feelings were like summer showers—not for the day, but for the hour. Day, indeed, was a portion of time of which Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe knew little. She lived, she became animated, only at candle-light; in fact, she merely tolerated sunshine for the sake of her agricultural tenants. At the first blaze of her perfumed wax-lights, like the lark at the blush of morn, she would revive, plume herself, rise, as it were, from the earth, and flutter about with sparkling brilliance. I never could exactly ascertain whether she was really witty herself, but I have many times known her inspire wit in others. In her drawing-room, I have frequently heard the cleverest things uttered by persons who elsewhere never evinced more than an ordinary degree of talent.

Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe afforded the

most perfect contrast to her daughter. I have already spoken of Emilie when a child; as she advanced in years she realized all the promises of her charming girlhood. During the eight years which had now elapsed since I first saw her, she had acquired all those beaming charms which inspire the most ardent passions. Yet, in spite of her youth, Emilie, with all her beauty, excited less admiration than her mother, or, more properly speaking, she excited less general admiration. Prettiness is always a quality more generally understood and appreciated than genuine beauty. A characteristic remark of Gossec will afford a just conception of the relative attractions of Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe and Emilie:—"When I look at the mother, with her animated expression," said he, "*allegretto!* the liveliest airs imaginable come into my head; but when I turn to gaze at the beautiful daughter, *largo! largo!*—I feel, as it were, the strains of a solemn hymn resounding through my soul."

Their characters were as different as their style of features and manners. Their mode of thinking was rarely sympathetic. Excepting on one subject—politics,—their opinions seldom coincided. In one respect, however, they perfectly resembled each other—the dispositions of both were as kind and benevolent as their forms were fair. Mademoiselle

Emilie subsequently became the wife of M. de Sartine; but not till after she had inspired more than one deep and ardent passion, to which, possibly, she herself was not wholly insensible.

One of the most interesting mysteries of the human heart, is a sort of love without result—a *second-hand* love, if I may so call it. It is a purified variety of the passion; a sentiment unnurtured by the hope on which love is usually fed and strengthened. It is a passion quite unearthly in its nature; but not the less real. Thousands feel the influence of this sentiment, though they never divulge its existence. The lover shall not so much as press with his lips the glove of her he adores, and yet he receives her favours. He shall not venture on the most distant approach to a declaration, and yet she shall know all he feels. He shall never once address her in other language than that of ordinary conversation, and yet he shall always be communing with her in the language of love. A look, a gesture, a word, even the slightest hint, will suffice to make this sort of love understood and reciprocated. Like all other loves, it has its fallings-out, its reconciliations, its happy moments, and unhappy hours. The sentiment I am describing is not what is called platonic love. That is selfish and exclusive; the most niggardly of all affections. The love I allude to tends, on

the contrary, to refine and elevate the feelings. To some persons this may doubtless appear very mysterious, but I will endeavour to illustrate my meaning. Does it not often happen to those who are fond of music, that, suddenly moved by a fine combination of harmony, or by the pathos of a touching melody, they instinctively combine with the strains to which they are listening thoughts of some cherished being from whom they are parted? Well! my *second-hand love* is precisely that! It is a soul which breathes a strain in unison with your own; in short, it is the hymn which Emilie inspired in Gossec. It is a love which cannot give umbrage to husband, wife, or lover. Who can be jealous of a strain of music?

Such was the love which Mademoiselle de Sainte-Amaranthe excited in several susceptible hearts. The attachment cherished for her by one of the most agreeable performers of our lyric stage, was of the most ardent and romantic nature. He was at the time young, handsome, and full of enthusiasm, and though subsequently I knew him to be touched by passions of a less ethereal cast, yet there were none, I am persuaded, so tender, or on which his memory dwelt so fondly.

Apropos of the practice I occasionally adopt, of throwing the veil of anonymous obscurity over

some of the individuals alluded to in these pages. I am reminded of the artist whom, without naming, I introduced to the reader as the historiographer of the life of Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe. He entered the Academy of Painting in a very singular way, and though his talents cannot be questioned, yet, as the mode of his admission into that illustrious body was not very complimentary, I will refrain from naming him, whilst I submit to the reader the following droll story.

There was a vacant place in the Academy of Painting, and, as usual, no lack of candidates for the honour of filling it. The public voice, or, at least, the opinion of the leading artists and amateurs, soon named the individuals to whom the choice of the Academy should be particularly directed. After setting aside those whose claims were of the mere ordinary kind, there remained two men of talent, between whom it was determined that the election should be decided. Now it so happened, that the patronage of the Duke de Duras and of Marshal de Richelieu interfered with the freedom of election. Each of these distinguished personages supported the pretensions of his respective *protégé*, and neither would yield to the other. The one vaunted the vigorous colouring of his candidate, and the other retorted by

boasting of the graceful compositions of *his*. Now let us see how the important question was decided.

It happened, that about that time the amusement of horse-racing became quite the rage. Every Frenchman, who had the least pretension to fashion, fell in with the prevailing taste. A clever jockey was esteemed a person of high importance, and horses became the first objects of consideration. The columns of the journals were filled with the names of celebrated racers, their genealogy, their age, their good qualities, and last, not least, the triumphs which they had gained. In short, nothing was talked of but the turf. It was not merely a fashion or a whim—it was a rage—a madness. The Bois de Vincennes, the Plaine des Sablons, and Versailles, resounded with the neighing of the steeds, and the slang of their riders. Ladies thronged to the race-courses, and excited the emulation of the various candidates. The example of the capital soon became contagious throughout the provinces, and all France was infected with the racing furor. The Prince de Ligne—the brilliant, the witty, the renowned Prince de Ligne, joined in the general furor, and laid a wager with the wealthy butcher, Jean-Pierre Caribouffe. The Prince's equerry drove a team of six horses against

Caribouffe, who drove a cart drawn by six bulldogs, and the dogs (as the proverb says every dog has) had the day. This sport was soon imitated, nay, surpassed; quadrupeds of every description were brought into play as the subject of bets. At Fontainebleau, a race between forty horses was succeeded by another between the same number of asses. The victor, in the latter race, was rewarded by a golden thistle, wrought by the first goldsmith in Paris. The example thus set in high quarters soon took effect also, and then ass-races became quite the vogue. In short, there was no stable, of any reputation, but had its *saddle-asses*.

Whilst this ridiculous amusement was at its height, there was one day heard in the vicinity of Bagatelle, (the country residence of the Count d'Artois,) a noise not precisely in keeping with the elegance which characterized the chateau of the princely *petit-maitre*. Presently several of the royal carriages made their appearance, conveying the Queen and some of the ladies of the court. Marie-Antoinette alighted, and was conducted by the Count to a tent decorated with taste and splendor. A flourish of trumpets at intervals resounded through the air, and summoned to the spot crowds of amateurs and idlers, who literally lined the Bois de Boulogne. At length

the signal was given, the stables of Bagatelle were thrown open, and twenty asses, of the choicest breed, sallied forth, elegantly saddled, and shaking their heads and ears at the uneasiness which they felt in their unaccustomed trappings. In a few minutes they were mounted by twenty youthful jockeys, dressed in the liveries of the Queen and of the Prince. What could all this mean? Will it be believed? On ten of those asses depended the fate of one artist, and on the other ten that of his rival. The unconscious painters were as little aware as the assembled crowd of spectators, on what a ludicrous chance the question of their merits was staked. Neither did the Queen or the Prince imagine that the alternative of their protection or discountenance of an incipient Raphael or Michael Angelo was to depend upon the speed of an ass! The fact is, that, unable to come to any agreement as to the merits of their respective favorites, M. de Duras and M. de Richelieu seriously determined that their choice should be determined by the issue of this famous race. They might, to be sure, have settled the question by a cast of the dice, but they thought there would be more drollery in letting the asses decide the fate of the artists. Thus the Queen and the Prince, who were intent only on the reputation of their respective asinine studs, were unconsciously pro-

moting the advance of painting. Inspired by all sorts of stimulating food, the impatient coursers started off nimbly, and rushed with impetuosity towards the goal. The race was won! The Comte d'Artois received the golden thistle . . . and the academician was appointed¹!

But, to return from this little excursion to the ass-course. At the time of my introduction to the drawing-room of Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe, her social circle still maintained its superiority over its rival coteries. Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe's parties were untrammelled by any regulations, either as to the rank of the guests or the objects for which they were assembled. The assumed attraction was always *trente-et-un*; for, as Madame used to say, "every one who joins in the game takes his rank according to his card, not even a duke has any precedence." In other circles a visitor, on his first introduction, felt it necessary to ascertain and adopt the tone and manner of the rest of the company. The conversation was clothed, as it were, in the family-livery; and the company were required to imbue themselves with the spirit of the host. Whether the entertainer happened to be a nobleman or a wealthy financier, it mattered not, it was necessary to obey the word of

¹ Surely in this case *associate* would have been a better title for the successful candidate than academician. Ed.

command, and conform to rules. This system was more or less rigorously adhered to in particular cases, but still it was never altogether neglected. With Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe, on the contrary, the guests all mingled on terms of equality; no one being held superior to another. Her drawing-room was, in fact, a miniature of Paris; the school of genuine French conversation. Many topics were broached, but few dwelt upon; if a serious discussion commenced, it was cut short by some humorous sally. A quarter of an hour was devoted to philosophy, an hour to the news of the day, and three-fourths of the evening to literature and the arts. At a later period, when the ideas introduced by the revolution became the subjects of discussion in general society, Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe's reunions became more interesting than ever. Men of science and literature, artists and actors, wealthy *bourgeois*, and idlers, all who resorted thither were, in some sort, the representatives of their respective classes. Each brought his stock of news, and was ready to exchange it for the stock brought by others. My friend's drawing-room was a sort of general dépôt, where all interests and passions were brought into contact. But when those interests increased in importance, and those passions changed their object—when the days of conversions and apos-

tacies arrived—then the waverers disappeared, either through shame of, or inability to account for, their sudden transformations.

In those days, Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe's circle of acquaintance was incessantly renewed. Her saloon might be compared to a gallery, in which the pictures were constantly slipping away, and being replaced by others in uninterrupted succession. One of the desertions, which excited most attention, was that of the Marquis de Condorcet. He had, it is true, never been very assiduous in his visits, sometimes showing himself only once in a month or two; but whenever he did come, he made himself exceedingly agreeable. I have repeatedly seen him there, and listened to his brilliant sallies of wit. He was a model of a well read nobleman, and no one knew better how to give an easy turn to conversation, without allowing it to degenerate into mere commonplace. He had got into his head some strange and original notions on the indefinite perfectibility of mankind. He entertained the conviction that man might become a kind of demi-god. By the aid of a system of education yet to be discovered, any body might, he alleged, become equal to Voltaire. By the observance of a regimen which he traced out, every child was to be a Hercules, and every old man a Methuselah. And all these grand improve-

ments were to date their origin from the taking of the Bastille.

M. de Champcenetz ridiculed these philosophical dreams in his usual vein of raillery. He maintained, that if mankind are not what they should be, it is because they should not be otherwise than they are; and M. de Condorcet used to say, "The strongest argument I have heard against the possibility of my system of perfection, is that adduced by Champcenetz." But no one opposed him more earnestly or more ably than the Count de Tilly, who used to be known as *Le beau Tilly*. Nothing was more amusing than to hear a discussion between him and Condorcet. Count de Tilly seemed to me most frequently to have the best side of the argument, but this only had the effect of bringing out M. de Condorcet to greater advantage. The latter argued for the purpose of convincing, while the former was merely intent on display.

How charming were the prophetic visions of M. de Condorcet! How enchanting the illusive pictures exhibited in his magic lantern! The new world of his imagination presented a charming contrast to our own dull reality. His women were all beautiful, kind, and faithful; his men all noble-minded and generous; and as for France!—truly Mahomet never dreamed one tithe of all that

M. de Condorcet placed between the Rhine and the Pyrenees! Every thing was to flourish in perfection. The fruits of the earth were not only to be improved, but magnified. Cherries were to be like peaches—peaches as large as melons. The sun itself, which was to bring all these wonders to maturity, was to pour down an increased volume of vivifying rays! But Count de Tilly mercilessly demolished this fine universe. He blew down these castles in the air as if they had been built of cards. And yet, I must confess, we were annoyed at his triumphs; and why? Because such was the charm of Condorcet's illusions, that Count de Tilly excited a feeling of disappointment by dispelling them.

The Chevalier Richard, another of Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe's visitors, was a man of a very original turn of mind. He had formerly been chief page to Madame Adelaide, but his excellent feelings were uncontaminated by a court life. He had turned practical philosopher, and had a hobby of his own. He devoted many years to forming a collection of portraits. This collection was numerous and varied. Whether a portrait was well or ill executed, mattered not to the Chevalier; all he wanted was a transcript of the features of persons who had played distinguished parts in the world, and had rendered themselves

remarkable, no matter how. The walls of his rooms were literally covered with portraits, from the ceiling to the floor. After his death, the stalls on the bridges and quays were covered with them for more than two months. They were sold by the heap, like apples or pears.

The Chevalier Richard was naturally led, by the possession of these portraits, to a knowledge of the persons they represented, and, as his acquaintance was very extensive, he became extremely well versed in all kinds of family history. He was a sort of living register of the annals of indiscretion. He knew enough secrets to set nine-tenths of Paris by the ears, but he had the good sense to preserve the scandal exclusively for his particular friends, while he took pleasure in giving publicity to such unknown deeds, as were likely to reflect honour on the parties concerned.

One of the most curious results of his genealogical investigations, was the discovery of the family descent of Charlotte Corday. When that extraordinary woman plunged a dagger into the breast of Marat, a change began to be looked for in France. The blow would strike terror into the hearts of all the proconsuls, and, in the first impulse of their joy, the oppressed party glorified the heroine as a second Judith. The boldness of the act astounded every one. Portraits of Char-

lotte Corday were eagerly bought up, and information regarding the circumstances of her life were eagerly sought for. Here was an interesting field for the researches of the Chevalier Richard ; he shortly afterwards imparted to us in confidence, the most irrefragable proofs of her relationship to that dramatic writer who excelled all others in the delineation of the sublime virtues of heroic minds. He satisfied me beyond all doubt, that the young female who assassinated Marat was descended from the poet whose pen so admirably depicted the impulses which guide the actions of great conspirators. Charlotte Corday, in fact, was grand-niece of the great Corneille.

Thus we see that the heroic spirit of Corneille's tragedies was transfused into the heart of his descendant. Doubtless the character of *Æmilia*, as drawn by her grand-uncle, fired the imagination of Charlotte Corday. I wrote down this curious genealogy at the dictation of the Chevalier Richard, and the document proved the cause of some trouble to me, as I shall by-and-by relate.

CHAPTER XXV.

Mirabeau's visit to the Théâtre Français.—His reception by the performers.—Enthusiasm of Molé.—His compliment to Mirabeau.—The performance of Charles IX. again discussed.—Fête of the Champ de Mars.—Riot at the Théâtre Français.—The audience insist on the performance of Charles IX.—Embarrassing position of the performers.—Applause bestowed on Talma.—Round hats and cocked hats.—Danton conducted to the Hotel de Ville.—Correspondence between Talma and Mirabeau.—Talma's instability of mind.—His love of flattery.—His dismissal from the Théâtre Français.—Disturbance in the theatre.—The actors summoned before the Mayor of Paris.—Bailly, the celebrated astronomer.—Some particulars of his early life.—Re-instatement of Talma.—Retirement of Mademoiselles Raucourt and Contat.—Revolutionary enthusiasm of Talma and Dugazon.

A FEW days prior to the celebrated fête of the Champ de Mars, Mirabeau visited our green-room. The great orator was accompanied by a party of friends, or rather, devoted admirers, who escorted him as a group of staff-officers

would escort their general. We had been informed of the intended visit, and that its object was to solicit the representation of Chenier's "Charles IX." All our *corps dramatique* were anxious to be present on the occasion, especially the ladies. We appeared in full dress, and every preparation was made to give due effect to the reception of the great man. Molé was seized with one of his enthusiastic fits in favour of Mirabeau. He declared Mirabeau to be a first-rate painter in words, an ingenious composer of euphonious sounds, a sublime musician without notes, the Gluck of oratory; in short, had he not been Molé, he would have wished to be Mirabeau. He was of opinion that Mirabeau would have been a brilliant ornament of the histrionic art, had he devoted his talents to the stage.

On the day when the great orator delivered in the assembly his celebrated speech on national bankruptcy, Molé was present. During that matchless effusion of eloquence, he listened with rapture to Mirabeau. He observed attentively the expression of the speaker, his energy, and variety of language in depicting the grand and terrific image of the yawning gulf, into the depths of which he seemed to grope with one hand outstretched before him, while with the other he grasped the tribune like the shipwrecked mariner

clinging to the plank on which his life depends. When Mirabeau had finished his speech, Molé stepped up to him, and said: "Ah! Sir, what a splendid oration! What a voice! What action! What a pity you should so have mistaken your profession! What a sublime actor you would have made!"

But in spite of Molé's raptures, and the expressed wishes of the majority of our fair associates, it was indispensable that prudence should guide our determination on the question of the performance of "Charles IX." The position of the Comédie Française was growing more and more difficult; it was necessary that we should maintain a sort of neutrality, while we were, in fact, partaking of every shade of party. It was therefore resolved that the honour conferred on us by our distinguished visitor, should be regarded simply as the application of a theatrical amateur. It was arranged that the performers, who were on the list for the week should receive him and reply to him, so that the remarks on either side should not assume a more formal character, than that of a casual conversation.

Mirabeau requested the performance of "Charles IX." for the entertainment of his Provençal deputies, on the occasion of the Fête of the Federation.

Now "Charles IX." had no connexion what-

ever with the fête; but on the other hand, the pièce was altogether calculated to excite disorder, scandal, and irritation. The ceremony of the Champ de Mars, was intended to be an occasion for the interchange of brotherly love and reconciliation, it was therefore desirable to avoid whatever might tend to awaken party-feeling. For this, as well as other reasons, we declined to accede to Mirabeau's request. We might, it is true, have referred to the interdict of the court, but that we cautiously avoided, as it would unquestionably have caused political irritation. What a peal of oratorical thunder we should have drawn down upon our heads by the bare mention of the court!

The result of the conference was, that our company firmly declined to perform "Charles IX.," except in the event of a decided expression of the public voice in its favour.

"Enough;" said Mirabeau with ill-concealed disappointment, and he took his departure.

It was not long before the wishes of the public were unequivocally expressed. On the eve of the 14th July, 1790, the Provençal deputies sent up to attend the Fête of the Federation, wrote to us themselves to request the performance of "Charles IX." To their application we returned the same answer, which we had already given to their ambassador. In short, we presented them with a

second edition of it, embellished with every expression of politeness and respect. The federalists, who had been somewhat spoiled by the civilities shown them by the corporations of Paris, took umbrage at our refusal, and threatened to call us to account in the face of the public.

They kept their word, and on the 21st of that memorable month, the Provençal deputies were at their posts. "Epiménide" was the play announced for performance; Naudet, Talma, and Mademoiselle Lange were on the stage, and the curtain had risen only a few feet above the boards, when loud cries of "Charles IX." resounded from all parts of the theatre. Not content with impromptu vociferations, one of the deputies had prepared a set speech for the occasion. Having after no little difficulty obtained silence, he treated us with a lecture full of patriotic sentiments and high-sounding phrases, and at the close of his harangue, the cries for "Charles IX." were renewed with increased violence.

Naudet, who at once clearly saw the difficulty of our position, advanced in front of the stage, and addressed to the audience a respectful, but dignified explanation. This, however, instead of soothing, served only to increase the impatience of the public, who now accused the performers of want of patriotism. Naudet replied, that the in-

disposition of Madame Vestris rendered the performance of the play in question impossible; he added moreover, that Saint Prix was confined to his house by illness. But these statements had no effect in restoring tranquillity; in fact, the tumult continued to increase. Talma, who was on the stage, had remained a calm spectator of the scene until the moment when several voices pronounced the names of those performers who, it was pretended, regulated the affairs of the Théâtre Français, and rendered the *répertoire* subservient to their opinions and caprices. At these words Naudet's equanimity almost forsook him; he was on the point of giving utterance to a warm retort, and if he had, heaven knows to what lengths the fury of the audience might have proceeded. Fortunately, at this critical juncture Talma stepped forward, and, after assuring them that Madame Vestris was really indisposed, expressed his conviction that she would notwithstanding give evidence of her zeal and patriotism, by playing in "Charles IX." With regard to the part allotted to Saint Prix, it might, he observed, be read. Talma's address had the effect of appeasing the tumult, and the performance of "Epiménide" was allowed to proceed.

We had now no alternative left but submission, and we accordingly set to work to prepare for the

friends of Mirabeau the performance they so earnestly desired. Madame Vestris, Dugazon's sister, though still suffering from illness, promised to do her best, and Grammont studied Saint-Prix's part, so as to be able to read it with tolerable effect. The 24th of July was the night fixed for the performance of "Charles IX."

It is possible that our conduct in this matter may seem, in some degree, inconsistent. It may be asked why, having received the royal veto against the performance of "Charles IX." (which, indeed, was our principal reason for hesitating to perform it), we did not excuse ourselves to Mirabeau on that ground alone? Then, again, when the public, or rather the Federalists, peremptorily demanded the piece, why did we consent to perform it, instead of screening ourselves behind the expressed prohibition of the Sovereign?

Such questions may very naturally be asked, but an explanation of the peculiar circumstances in which we were placed, must form our justification. Only a short time previous to this affair, we were comedians in ordinary to the King, and although a new law had placed us under the jurisdiction of the Hotel de Ville, yet we did not, on that account, cease to be the servants of his majesty, whose commands we received through

the medium of the gentlemen of his bed-chamber. To whom, then, did we owe allegiance? If to the municipality, how far was its authority to extend? Where were the limits of the two conflicting powers defined? These were difficult questions to be decided by us poor comedians. We found ourselves in an embarrassing position between the new power of the mayor of Paris and the old-established authority of M. de Duras! How could we, on the one hand, say to the enraged public,—“This piece is forbidden by order of the court,” or, on the other hand, how could we present our weekly *répertoire*, as was our custom, for the approval of the court, with the name of the proscribed piece in the list? This latter mode of proceeding would have been tantamount to telling the King that we were no longer his servants. Between the commands of a law which we did not perfectly understand, and the regulations which ancient custom had established, how were we to decide? Indeed the rival powers themselves did not seem to have any very clear notions of their respective rights. We therefore deemed it expedient to temporise, as well as we could, until a period should arrive when one of the two great powers should be declared triumphant; reserving for ourselves a good excuse in case of necessity.

The performance of “Charles IX.” was attended

with all its anticipated success. Grammont read the part of the Cardinal very effectively, and Talma, who surpassed himself on the occasion, was called for, at the fall of the curtain, and received three rounds of applause. However, the evening did not pass over without some disturbance. Though the wishes of a large portion of the public were gratified, yet the performance was more than once interrupted by symptoms of discontent. The pit was several times the scene of disputes between the advocates of the old and new systems. Certain passages were caught up and made subjects of contention between the hostile parties.

Amongst other things, the infringement of an old theatrical regulation at this time, created a violent disturbance throughout the whole theatre. An old-established rule had hitherto required that the gentlemen in the pit should take off their hats during the performance. This was a well-understood law both of politeness and convenience. But on this occasion, the civic round hats were not so ready to conform to the regulation as the Gothic cocks. Possibly the refusal was regarded as one of the new rights of man to annoy his neighbour. Several obstinate fellows persisted in refusing to uncover their heads, which gave rise to an uproar

so vehement as for a time to drown every word of the performance.

“ Stop a moment, M. le Cardinal,” cried one of the spectators in the pit. “ Wait till we make that fellow take off his hat !” saying which, the speaker pointed to a broad-faced, fierce-looking person near him, whose hat remained immoveably fixed on his head.

“ Do you flatter yourself that you can force *me* to take off my hat ?” said the broad-faced, fierce-looking person.

“ Certainly,” was the reply.

“ And you *shall* be forced to take it off !” exclaimed several angry voices at once.

At these words, the individual to whom they were addressed started up indignantly. As he rose, his tall, athletic figure seemed almost gigantic. This man subsequently became celebrated in our revolutionary history ; but on the occasion here referred to he was merely recognized by some individuals in the pit, as *le nommé* Danton. Striking his hat more closely down over his brow, as the tumult increased—“ Firm as the hat of Servandony¹ !” cried he, flourishing his arm triumphantly.

This defiance set the whole house in an uproar,

¹ One of the towers of Saint-Sulpice was called “ the Hat of Servandony.”

amidst which *le nommé* Danton was conveyed to the Hotel-de-Ville.

Chenier was greatly astonished at finding his play brought forward again, and not being aware of the coercion exercised upon us, complained of our having disregarded his request by performing it in the middle of summer. We, however, shifted the blame to the shoulders of the party who had created all the trouble and disturbance, and who, as we informed Chenier, had made us a request which there was no possibility of resisting. At this Talma took fire. Conceiving that he was one of the party alluded to, he thought that he should be regarded by the public as having got up the tumultuous scene of the 27th July. In order to free himself from this suspicion, he wrote to Mirabeau, requesting his permission to name *him* as the person who had demanded the performance of "Charles IX." This request Mirabeau very readily granted. He wrote to Talma, distinctly authorising him to state that he, Mirabeau, had solicited, and even "insisted upon the performance of 'Charles IX.' in the name of the Provençal Federalists."

Thus Talma was justified, and the question seemed to be set at rest, when an unlucky article appeared in a newspaper, intitled, "Les Révolutions de France et de Brabant," accusing our associate,

Naudet, of interfering with the liberty of the stage, and of aiming a blow at Talma, Chenier, and others. The ire of the dramatist was once more aroused. He published a long letter, complaining of libels and anonymous articles, which none of our theatrical company could with justice be suspected of writing, and least of all Naudet, who was a frank, straight-forward fellow, incapable of duplicity. This letter of Chenier called forth another from Talma, still in reference to the article in the journal above mentioned. But in this letter Talma committed the mistake of adverting to the circumstances connected with the performance of "Charles IX.," which had occurred six months previously, and which ought to have been consigned to oblivion, the more especially as the whole affair had terminated satisfactorily.

This was imprudent ; but Talma, whose natural goodness of disposition was only equalled by his weakness of mind, was very easily influenced. I have known several remarkable examples of men who possessed the power of exciting in others the most stirring emotions of the soul, whilst they themselves were scarcely endowed with the smallest share of self-determination. So entirely were their faculties absorbed in the object of their studies, that they had none left for the ordinary business of life.

When the sensibilities of the heart are highly excited, the vigour of the mind relaxes, and may be said to fall asleep. In this respect Talma was a profound sleeper. This would not have signified much, had he been left to himself; but others undertook to guide the steps of the sleep-walker. His good star had not yet lighted him to the interesting daughter of Vanhove. He had just contracted his first marriage, which placed him in a position of affluence, and to the circle of his real friends was added an influx of flatterers. Those who succeed in warding off the attacks of envy, are not always capable of arming themselves against flattery. Talma's weak side was his thirst for celebrity. His pretended friends urged him to make a noise in the world. Noise must have its echoes, and thus each echoing parasite finds his vocation.

The unlucky epistle above mentioned was read at a general meeting of the performers of our company. I knew nothing of it till a few hours before it was taken into consideration, and my indignation was very great. Much as I regretted the loss of an actor of such splendid promise as Talma, it was I who proposed his dismissal from the company, and the proposal was instantly and almost unanimously adopted.

This bold step was followed by the result which we had anticipated. The affair was speedily made

known at the Hotel de Ville, and a message from the mayor of Paris recommended us not to dismiss our comrade. To this advice, however, as may be readily supposed, we paid little or no attention. But the public took up the question rather more warmly. We never doubted that Talma had partizans, but we now discovered he had the whole populace on his side. Hatred of despotism was the prevailing feeling of the day, and we were loudly accused of the odious crime. The ominous epithets of *aristocrates* and *inciviques* were freely applied to us. Some of the mob-orators threatened to denounce our conduct to the National Assembly, whilst others, mounted on the posts in the Place de la Comédie, harangued the multitude with invectives against us. Some of these turbulent spirits were sincere, whilst others merely acted a part. The political intriguers of the day wanted a disturbance, no matter whence, why, or wherefore, and as this theatrical dispute promised to occupy public attention for a month or so, they encouraged and fomented it. A reconciliation between us and Talma would have been to them a most unfortunate occurrence.

On the 16th September, our theatre was filled as if it had been a free night. It was evident that the crowd had assembled for some other object than to witness the performance. We felt instinct-

ively that we should have to defend ourselves against an attack, and each of us was ready at his post. It happened to be my turn to be in attendance as *Semainier*, and accordingly I posted myself where duty called me—at the cannon's mouth.

Before the curtain rose, but few demonstrations were made; merely some little noise and a few hisses, occurrences of no unusual nature. At length the leader of the band gave the well-known tap, and the overture commenced. We listened anxiously, but nothing could we hear beyond the sound of the music, except a long and low murmur, which certainly presaged no good. It was like the wind howling among the leaves, before the hurricane uproots the tree. We awaited in anxious suspense, prepared to die on our curule chairs. Our adversaries, some of them at least, were among us. Dugazon, with pale face and disordered hair, stood on the right wing, whilst I was posted on the left; but all anger was suspended between us, all our individual feelings were absorbed in our general anxiety for the supreme sentence about to be pronounced on us. If we spoke, it was in a low tone of voice, such as is assumed in a church; a sort of murmur, rendering us more sensible of the awful silence. At length the long-drawn bows of the orchestra

lingered on the last chord of the overture. The signal was given, and the curtain rose. Instantly, there issued from every corner of the theatre a thousand voices united into one tremendous shout of "Talma! Talma!"

It was like a clap of thunder. I stepped forward to brave the storm. I bowed; and when silence was obtained, I thus addressed the audience:—

"Gentlemen, the company to which I have the honour to belong, persuaded that M. Talma has by an act of imprudence compromised the public tranquillity, have unanimously resolved to suspend their association with him, until the question shall be decided by the competent authority."

It may be easily imagined how my explanation was received by the audience I have above described. Some few friends applauded, but the vast majority overwhelmed me and my adherents with a torrent of opprobrious cries. The voices fell upon my ear in terrific confusion, mingling in one general shout of fierce defiance. Still, however, I kept my place, being anxious if possible to hear and to reply, when Dugazon started forward to the front of the stage. Cries of silence ensued, and the tumult was instantly suspended.

"Are we to have Talma?"

"No, gentlemen, no," replied Dugazon; "but I wish to inform you that the company are about

to treat me in the same way as they have treated him. I accuse the whole company," he continued, with increasing warmth; "it is false to allege that Talma has betrayed his insulted associates and compromised the public peace. His offence consists solely in having declared that 'Charles IX.' might be performed—nothing more."

This sally was far from appeasing the tumult. Scarcely had Dugazon ceased to speak, than the most Babel-like confusion of tongues proceeded from every corner of the theatre. Some stretched themselves over from the upper boxes to address persons in the tier below; others maintained dialogues by bawling from one side of the theatre to the other, keeping up a kind of cross-fire of voices, amidst which some menacing expressions fell upon my ear. Nevertheless, I resolutely braved the storm: I stirred not a step from the spot on which I continued bowing, endeavouring with all my exertions to unriddle the confusion of words which assailed my ears. At length I succeeded in comprehending that I was required to read the report of the proceedings of the meeting, at which Talma's dismissal had been determined on. I gave the word to Delaporte, who was at the prompter's hole, and, in a moment the document was handed to me. But I was not permitted to read it to its end; the tumult increased, and some of the au-

dience were preparing to climb from the pit to the stage. I observed the intended invasion, and I called out as loudly as I possibly could, to the persons behind the scenes: "Where is Dugazon? Let us begin the 'Ecole des Maris.'" But Dugazon was nowhere to be found, he had disappeared. The whole house was now in a perfect uproar, the female portion of the audience had fled from the scene of riot, and the men in the pit were evidently providing themselves with missiles by tearing up the benches. Presently a large fragment of wood was thrown on the stage, and had I not saved myself by an almost miraculous leap from the front of the stage to the side-scenes, I verily believe I should never again have trodden the boards of the Théâtre Français. Fortunately, at this juncture the military made their appearance, in time to save the theatre from destruction.

Next day our company was summoned to appear before M. Bailly¹. We felt it no small humiliation that we comedians in ordinary to the King, should be thus summoned before the municipal bar. Such a proceeding was quite at variance with all our notions of propriety, and when the chief magistrate addressing us, expressed his as-

¹ Bailly, the celebrated astronomer, was mayor of Paris at the time here alluded to.

tonishment that we should have neglected his orders regarding Talma, more than one of our party was, I verily believe, almost tempted to reply in the words of the Doge of Venice to Louis XIV.; "what astonishes *us* is to find ourselves here." We could not reconcile to our minds the incongruous juxta-position of the stage, the mayoralty, and the science of astronomy.

We were, however, unjust both to the mayor and to astronomy. M. Bailly's science was not of a very austere character, and it was currently reported that prior to his wooing the sage Urania, the philosopher had conferred a share of his devotions on her younger sisters. His early years had been passed among those gay sons of song, the Panards, the Pérons, and the Collés, the friends and companions of his father, who was a painter of secondary talent, at a period when that sort of talent passed for first rate.

Bailly's father frequently exchanged the palette for the sock, and the minor theatres on more than one occasion resounded with the applause which his success drew forth. His favourite style of performance was in burlesque tragedy, and he was therefore greatly incensed at surprising his son one day exercising his poetic talents on the "slow length" of the pompous Alexandrine, and presuming, within the very dwelling of Momus, to

burn his grain of incense on the altar of the tragic Muse. As a punishment, he prescribed to him a parody, a sort of gay conception in his own style, and the youth made amends for his transgression by composing a burlesque grand opera, which furnished Anscame with a hint for his "Adieux de Thalie."

Lanoue, the author of "Mahomet II." and of "La Coquette Corrigée," an excellent comedian, who formerly belonged to our company, had performed the part of Mentor to young Bailly, and, as it were, drove him to the science which he afterwards cultivated so successfully, by curing him of his tragic vein.

Bailly's manner was marked by urbanity during our interview. Even at this distant period, I have a vivid recollection of his pale, contemplative countenance, which, when he cast down his eyelids, (a frequent habit with him,) presented an expression simply dignified and grave. Laborious study had deeply furrowed his brow, and imparted to the whole of his countenance that grandeur of character, which distinguishes the sculptures of antiquity.

The first words addressed to us by the magistrate were in a tone of parental kindness, but when we spoke to him of our embarrassing position in relation to the gentlemen of the bed-

chamber, he seemed annoyed. This, however, was but a momentary feeling. He endeavoured to make us understand that we had done with the dynasties of Duras and Richelieu, that he was now himself the sole arbiter of the discipline of the Théâtre Français, and that we must give him a definite answer as to our intentions with reference to Talma. This answer, however, he did not obtain, and the audience concluded without any settlement of the point at issue. The consequence was, an order issued by the Municipal Council, directing us to perform with Talma. This order was duly notified to us; nay more, it was placarded throughout all Paris. Still we stood upon our rights, and, instead of immediately complying with this order, we appointed a deputation to wait upon the council to discuss the subject. We chose as our deputies Bellemont and Vanhove, the two patriarchs of our company, men distinguished for their sense of justice and probity, and quite uninfluenced by party feeling.

Our two ambassadors were directed to notify to the Municipal Council, that we did not recognize their authority to interfere in our affairs, and that in consequence, we could not obey the order they had issued.

The effect of our message was to excite the serious indignation of the members of the council,

in consequence of which fresh injunctions were issued from the Hotel de Ville, *commanding* us to play with Talma. Moreover, a formal order was conveyed, both to him and to us, calling upon both parties to present memorials of their respective causes of complaint, in order that the council might pronounce its decision *en dernier ressort*.

Nothing therefore now remained for us, but to yield, and Talma, as a matter of course, returned in triumph to make his appearance in "Charles IX." The council had played its part to perfection! It had preserved to the imperious *parterre* a man of talent, but the same day which decided the restoration of Talma, witnessed also the resignation of Raucourt and Contat.

It will easily be believed that all this did not fail to excite a considerable degree of discussion and excitement among the members of our company. Our ladies, however, with the exception of Contat, Raucourt, and Vestris, who had taken up arms on the occasion, and excepting also the amiable Devienne, who would fain have soothed the bitterness of the conflicting parties, all observed a political neutrality.

As to Dugazon, he, like many others, was foolish enough to enact a part, though a very subordinate one, in the great drama of the revolution. For myself, if I had the prudence to avoid the in-

fection of the revolutionary fever, I could still make allowance for the feelings of those less cautious persons, who engaged more deeply in the strife of parties. Those who espoused the opinions which passed at that time for noble and generous, and Dugazon was pre-eminent among this class, mistook the beginning for the end. But having once committed themselves to their liberal leaders, they were forced either to become their unhesitating followers or their victims; apostacy being more prejudicial to the party than rebellion. Dugazon was soon undeceived, but to retreat then was certain destruction, and so he assumed a double mask. Fortunate, indeed, was it in those troubled times, that here and there men like him were invested with authority. Dugazon exercised his influence in protecting many meritorious men, and in screening more than one victim.

Talma's errors arose chiefly out of his inexperience, his eagerness to make his way in the world, and the indisputable weakness of his character. His enthusiasm for the revolution, however, was merely that of a great artist. He believed in the resurrection of the Forum, and its Ciceros, as he might well believe in the revival of Roscius. He imagined that antiquity had poured out its spirit upon France, and that if our red-heeled shoes, our gold-laced coats, and our point ruffles were well all

thrown into a huge mortar and pounded together, the result would be that Roman togas and Greek mantles would issue from the singular compound. He was, in fact, passionately fond of the toga; he wore it on the stage, wore it even at home, and, if he could have had his own way, he would have made every one else wear it. In short, his love of the revolution was the passion of a painter. Besides, he had a full presentiment of his own future eminence, and felt the value of the materials which the revolution offered for the working of his tragic genius. Deeply imbued with sentiments of the sombre cast, he surpassed every one in the expression of remorse, and he shook the dishevelled hair of Orestes with an impassioned grandeur, which no other actor could attempt to rival. Disgusted with the old beaten track which we were quietly pursuing, Talma boldly struck into a yet untrodden path, and when we tried to rein and restrain him, he broke from us and left us behind. In truth, in the eyes of the sublime Talma and of the comic Dugazon nothing appeared as it really was; the one being characterized by an almost childish freshness and simplicity of feeling, the other by a turn for drollery, which prevented his putting together two serious ideas. They had imagined that a revolution was to present itself all at once, like the shifting of a scene on the

stage. Their minds were of that cast, which feels too readily to feel always justly. Heedless of the clouds of life, their imagination was fixed upon the rainbow alone, and as to persons afflicted with jaundice everything seems imbued with yellow, so they beheld in every object the glowing tints of the iris. They laboured under a defective mental vision, though one of a very agreeable description, and it cost them some pain to be undeceived, and to see things, as they did at last, in their true colours.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Political influence of the Drama.—Changes required at the Théâtre Français.—Chénier and Fabre d'Eglantine.—Unfavourable position of the Dramatist compared with other writers.—Madame de G * * * *.—Her literary vanity.—Anecdote showing her courage and presence of mind.—Quid pro quo.—M. Daubenton, the celebrated naturalist.—Treatment of Madame de G * * * * by the National Assembly.—Her heroic answer to a cruel proposition.—Laharpe at the bar of the National Assembly.—Curiosity and interest excited by his appearance there.—Unjust proposal.—My new character in “le Fon par Amour.”—Truth in Art.—Rembrandt and Claude Lorraine.—Marionettes.—Success of my performance in a new line of characters.

THE time had now arrived when the government deemed it expedient to have a Théâtre Français of a less tenacious character than ours, and more fitted to be the instrument of directing those new ideas which were spreading, not only from day to day, but from hour to hour. Our ruling powers

had a presentiment of the influence which the stage must inevitably exercise over the turbulent masses, and they ordained that the theatre should act as an auxiliary to the popular assemblies. It was a wise determination, for the populace is no where more susceptible of impressions than at the theatre. It is there that public feeling is most easily excited. Those Revolutionists who would change the spirit of the age, should begin their operations with the drama.

The secret of appeasing the passions of mankind was one which our patriot enthusiasts never acquired, however successfully they practised the art of exciting them. Voltaire had already marked out a royal road to philosophy by introducing it upon the stage, and our patriots naturally hoped to see their political system advance with the swiftness of the eagle's flight, through the same channel. To effect this object, our old *répertoire* must needs be reformed, and the plays themselves revised and altered;—in short, it was indispensable that the actors of the old school should be superseded, or reduced to mere cyphers, although the “old stagers” were naturally for adhering to a *répertoire* to which they owed their fame, and which had become identified with them.

If the genius of revolution has its accomplices, it has likewise its courtiers, and the events of the

day received the flattering incense of many of our dramatic authors. Of those whose pens advocated the new order of things, Fabre d'Eglantine and Chénier were amongst the most distinguished; and to their superintendence there seemed to be an intention of consigning the national theatre.

There is one important point in which dramatic writing differs from literature of every other kind. The bookseller may make the fame and fortune of a writer of any other class; but the stage is the only sphere in which the genius of the dramatist must independently seek renown. Whilst the bookseller is circulating the works of twenty different authors in a day, the theatre gives publicity to the productions of only two dramatists at most. Thus it happens that when Corneille, Molière, Voltaire, Beaumarchais, or any other of that renowned host, becomes the revived favourite of the day, the contemporary play-writer is unheard of. It is the monopoly of the dead over the living. Supposing only ten nights in the year assigned to each of our celebrated old play-writers, three months of the year must be taken from our modern authors, whose three hundred and sixty-five nights are thereby reduced to two hundred and sixty, more or less. Then during the nine months devoted to the dramatists of past ages, let us only consider how many new plays may grow too old! It is melan-

choly to reflect on the jealousies, disappointments, and bitter recriminations which these years of nine months have occasioned ; for dramatic writing being most especially the literature of the day and the hour, it naturally follows that to hit the right day and hour, is an object of rivalry and contention among play-writers.

The well-known tirade of Basile is applicable to other things besides calumny. The graduated scale of *pianissimo*, *piano*, *crescendo*, *rinforzando*, may be made to regulate a hundred different species of attack. Whenever our dramatic authors were meditating warfare on us, *pianissimo* and soft words were the order of the day. It was like the swallow skimming along the surface of the ground. At the period of the coalition of which Beaumarchais was at the head, M. Lorvay de la Saussaie enacted the part of the swallow. On the occasion to which I have just now alluded, the part of the swallow was enacted by Madame de G

This lady was one of those writers who are prompted by literary vanity to sacrifice the gentler attractions of their sex, in an effort to make a parade of masculine energy and talent, which they do not possess. Female professional authors usually stand in a false position, however high their intellectual powers, unless, indeed, those powers be exercised with the grace

and sensibility of a Seigné, a Deshoulières, or a Riccoboni.

The greatest gratification of Madame de G . . . was to collect around her a circle of authors and academicians, not with the laudable desire of deriving instruction from their conversation, but for the mere vanity of extending to *them* the éclat of *her* favour.

With all her vanity and eccentricity, however, she was not without a certain degree of talent. She was gifted with the lively humour which characterizes the natives of Languedoc, her birth-place, and frequently showed great readiness of repartee. Of her quickness and presence of mind under trying circumstances, the following anecdote affords a proof.

In December, 1792, she conceived the strange idea of writing to the National Assembly, requesting to be admitted to defend the king. The Convention passed to the order of the day, but the populace, ever ripe for mischief, having heard of her singular application, which, however eccentric, was dictated by a generous feeling, assembled tumultuously before her house. Any other woman would have fled and concealed herself; but the bold high-spirited Madame de G went down to the door. Here the mob began by passing their jokes upon her, and soon

proceeded to reproaches and menaces, the fore-runners of more serious attacks. One rude fellow, impatient of the coolness she displayed, seized her with one hand, whilst with the other he tossed off her cap, and having thus exposed to view her grey hairs, exclaimed,—

“ Here goes the head of Madame de G for four-and-twenty sous! Once! twice!—does nobody bid? Twenty-four sous for this wonderful head! Who’ll bid for it?”

“ My good friend,” said the lady, as coolly as if she had been conversing in her own drawing-room, “ I offer you thirty sous for the lot, and I think I am fairly entitled to the preference.”

This sally, as may easily be supposed, put every one in good humour; and Madame escaped scatheless from a very perilous situation.

Madame de G had fixed her abode in the neighbourhood of the Comédie Française, and shortly after my introduction to her, as I was one day on my way to rehearsal, I observed her walking under the arcade of the theatre, in company with a very venerable-looking elderly gentleman. They were sauntering leisurely up and down, and the lady was endeavouring to get possession of the old gentleman’s arm, while he, on his part, seemed disposed to evade the compliment. Knowing, as I did, the pertinacity of Madame, I was

not astonished to see her persist, though I was somewhat surprised at the patience evinced by the worthy man, as he stopped and smiled, and at length yielding the desired arm, turned upon his companion an expression of peculiar blandness. I verily believed, Heaven forgive me ! that the sexagenary couple were engaged in courtship, and, in spite of my wonted discretion, could not resist the temptation of watching them for a time, to see how love scenes were enacted of yore. And a pastoral sure enough it was. I heard allusions to the dog and fidelity, and mention was made of sheep, coupled with the words meekness, sensibility, and tenderness.

On entering the green-room, I whispered to some of my comrades the discovery I had made, adding, that our tenacious friend, the authoress, who was persecuting us to bring out one of her plays, might possibly exercise her pen more successfully in the Idyll than the Drama.

“ How so ? ” asked Saint Fal.

“ I overheard her just now holding a most tender pastoral conversation with a venerable Thyrsis, under our arcade.”

“ Ha ! ha ! ” said Saint Fal, who had arrived at the theatre a few minutes before me, and had seen the two *Arcadians*. “ What a strange *quid-pro-quo* ! This Thyrsis of yours is no other than M.

Daubenton, the celebrated naturalist. He passes this way every day from the Academy to the Jardin des Plantes ; and whenever Madame de G get sight of him, she comes out to meet him. She is always tormenting him with the visions of her grand system of the *souls of beasts*, which was no doubt the subject of the conversation you overheard.

Such was the whimsical lady who besieged us with a five-act philosophical play, entitled, “L’Esclavage des Nègres;” and difficult was the part Dessessarts had to act in parrying her persevering attacks. Yet, with all her absurdities, she possessed many redeeming points. She had a warm heart ; she was compassionate, humane, and generous ; and, in one passage of her life at least, sublime.

At the time of the trial of Louis XVI., when she offered her services as one of his advocates, the Convention, as I have already stated, passed to the order of the day. Some of the members, however, noted this act of devotion, and inscribed her name on the list of persons whose conduct was to be subject to surveillance. Meanwhile, she pursued her literary labours, and succeeded in bringing out at one of the theatres a play founded on the events of the day, which was soon converted into a charge against her. It was held

to afford proofs of her being implicated with a famous general, who had at that time deserted the republican party. After the usual course of interrogations and threats, a regular confession was drawn up for her to sign. Maternal affection was known to be her strongest feeling; accordingly an attempt was made to entrap her into an accusation of the general, out of consideration for her son, who, in the event of her death, would have been left a destitute orphan.

To this odious and cruel proposition she replied:

“ I am a woman, and full of woman’s fears. I shrink from death, and dread the punishment you have the power to award me. But I have no confession to make; the love I bear my son is the source whence I shall derive courage to support me in my extremity. The mother who sacrifices her life to her sense of duty, prolongs her maternity beyond the tomb !”

Such was her noble reply. Had she been writing, such a sentiment probably would not have occurred to her; or, if it had, she would have judged it too simple to be written, for as a writer she was tasteless and inflated. But although an eccentric and volatile woman, she was, as we have just seen, a heroic parent. She was one of those persons whose characters are made up of incon-

gruities. An eminent writer has justly observed, that "there is a great bridge to cross from the head to the heart."

In November, 1790, M. de Laharpe, in his quality of senior Academician, proceeded to the National Assembly, at the head of an imposing deputation from the French Academy. How proud he looked as he passed along in his carriage; and how intense was the interest when he advanced to the bar of the National Assembly. Mirabeau was all attention; Barnave anxiously stooped forward to listen; Robespierre, all humility, looked like a schoolboy about to receive a lesson in rhetoric; while the Abbé Maury slyly raised a titter among his neighbours at the expense of the Academician. What was the object of the visit? Laharpe's look of importance indicated that he expected to rivet the attention of the Assembly by some deeply interesting address, in which he might probably say a little about literature, and a great deal about himself. Having drawn a large bundle of papers from his pocket, he hemmed twice, and then wiped his brow. . . . the deputies all the while gazing at him with the most eager and intense curiosity.

In the name of the majority of French dramatists of all classes and degrees, tragic, comic, and tragi-comic, M. de Laharpe appeared before the

National Assembly to present an address, which concerned alike the Théâtre Français and the future fate of his colleagues. In a pompous exordium, he reminded his hearers how much the most august assembly in the universe owed to men of letters, for having prepared the great political change just then accomplished by emancipating, as he styled it, the human mind. To his own efforts in this great cause he particularly alluded, and took especial pains to convince his auditors how extremely important it was to the well-being of the state, that his own chefs-d'œuvre and those of his colleagues should receive a higher pecuniary compensation. They were, he said, entitled to hold that high place in public estimation which had heretofore been engrossed by the comparatively feeble productions of Corneille, Molière, Racine, Crébillon, Voltaire, &c. In conclusion, these modest dramatists demanded "the established competition of *several companies* of comedians, authorised by law to perform all plays, whether the productions of *dead or living* authors."

This was truly a question of life or death ; it was striking at the very heart of the Comédie Française. Hitherto, all that had been asked for was competition and a second theatre. I had myself been an advocate for two rival establishments,

whose mutual emulation would impart new spirit to the drama. But the suggestion of creating several companies was rather too much. Its adoption would have enabled all these companies to perform *all our pieces*. By a late decree of the National Assembly, the good folks of Paris might every evening visit fifty-two places of amusement (already declared regular theatres), and might witness on one and the same night the performance of “Tartuffe,” of “Mahomet,” of “Iphigénie en Aulide,” or of “Cinna!” And we, the legitimate representatives of “Cinna,” and of “Iphigénie,” of “Tartuffe,” and of “Mahomet”—we, who should be unable to compete with our rivals, who could boast of the extra attractions of singing, dancing, and horsemanship,—must needs submit to be thus despoiled, and to see our property, which we had *legally* acquired, become the prey of strangers, scarcely able to utter the language, and certainly unworthy to meddle with the works of our great French dramatists. Oh! Messieurs de Laharpe, Chénier, Cailhava, Palissot, and you, too, Fabre d’Eglantine, where was your literary pride?—where was your justice? But enough of this subject at present. It is probable that I shall again recur to this subject by and by; and in the meanwhile I will turn to matters more immediately concerning myself.

If it be difficult to win public favour, in ever so small a degree, it is a thousand times more difficult to retain that favour for any length of time. When once an actor is stamped as a man of talent by the critics of the pit, he becomes the servant, nay the very slave, not merely of their amusements, but of their whims and caprices.

I knew this, and I also knew, that in acting, as well as in the other arts, to remain stationary at the point where approbation was first gained, is but to retrograde. Accordingly, I suffered no inconsiderable degree of apprehension, when I began to study my part in "*Dorval, ou le Fou par Amour*."

My performance of the character of Frederick II. had elevated me in public opinion, and no sooner did I attempt anything new than I was cast, as it were, into the mould of my former success, which thus became a sort of bed of Procrustes: I was lengthened or shortened according to circumstances.

"*Le Fou par Amour*" was a drama, in which passion and feeling were painted in the highest colours. All was in the extreme, and the feelings found no point of repose. Ardent love, torture of mind, aberration of intellect, hope, deception, anguish, terror, and sudden death, were the materials vividly worked up for stage effect, by the

author (M. de Ségur the younger). The striking points in the dialogue, the delicate turns of thought, the finely wrought sentiments, the interesting details of the drama, served merely as *obligato* accompaniments to add effect to the gloomy solo. My physical powers were not precisely suited to the character assigned to me in this play. The expression of my countenance was always more ready to yield to the influence of mirth than to that of grief. My eye, which would sparkle at the jests of Trissotin, would fail to give effect to the melancholy Saint Preux. But it was desirable that I should show what I could do in the serious style, for Monvel destined for me a principal part in his forthcoming play, "Les Victimes cloîtrées." With a full sense, therefore, of the confidence which M. de Ségur reposed in me, I played the character of the *Fou par Amour* with much the same sort of feeling as that with which a man practises firing with blank cartridge to prepare himself for more serious combats.

I was but little calculated to plunge at once into the grand pathetic style. Actors have their plagiarisms as well as authors, and how few can trace the grain of gold to the mine whence it is derived! I might perhaps manage to dress up some of Molé's effects, so as to pass for my own; but even an undetected theft does not constitute a

right of property. Besides, I was more desirous to study than to pillage Molé. He painted his characters in broad and vigorous strokes, but I saw no reason why a perfect perspective effect might not be given even to a miniature set in a ring.

In the world of art, that which is held to be truth to nature is not so much actual truth itself, as that to which the artist's skill imparts the semblance of truth and reality. For example:—the truth of Molé's action possessed nothing in common with Prévillé's, and Dazincourt's bore no resemblance whatever to Dugazon's. What then, thought I, should hinder me from finding within myself a form of truth adapted to my natural deficiencies, and suited to dramatic representations. I fortified myself in this idea by the recollection of the puppet-show of *Marionnettes*, which all Paris crowded to see in 1782. At first, the acting of the dolls merely excited laughter, but their springs were so ingeniously contrived and their motions so natural, that the spectators soon began to take pleasure in their performances. Deep was the interest inspired by a boxwood heroine, the victim of a cruel oaken persecutor; and various were the emotions excited by the pigmy actors, which the skill of the turner had called into existence. The very decorations of the miniature stage acquired at last in the mind's eye

the just proportions of real architecture. And if perchance, in some moment of absorbing interest, the gigantic hand of some unlucky machinist appeared on the Lilliputian scene, covering the whole of a fine Italian sky, and reminding the spectators of the reality which they had forgotten,—oh! what a storm of dissatisfaction would arise; what indignant cries of “Off! off!” would resound from all quarters against the intruding monster-fingers!

Now here the truth was in the scene-shifter’s hand, and the illusive deception in the pigmy actors. But illusion had been gradually brought about by means of the perfect harmony of the combinations, which were true to themselves and each other. It is this harmony of detail, when properly understood, and skilfully varied, which excites the impression of reality in art. If Claude Lorraine’s day-light be true, Rembrandt’s is false. Perhaps, indeed, neither of them is true; the first makes too lavish a use of the sun, while the second deals too much with the lamp. Yet their works enchant all who behold them. One, at least, if not both, of these great painters, has succeeded in creating illusion by the skill with which he has sacrificed real truth to his own truth, which is not truth at all. But such is the power of his art. He has decked his creations in the colours of his own imagination; and has rendered them

natural by his genius. We gaze with admiration on the productions of his magic pencil; and our judgment of them is formed, not according to the rules of nature, but according to the mode in which the painter has represented her¹.

Such were the *data* on which I set to work to study my new characters. My performance of the “*Fou par Amour*” was crowned with success. When the night of the “*Victimes cloîtrées*” arrived, the animated glance of my eye was changed to a wild and wandering stare; the natural weakness of my voice seemed to be the subdued utterance of a heart long inured to suffering, and my occasional bursts of energy were like those sudden efforts of the invalid, which always produce an imposing effect, because they appear to be the struggling of moral force against physical debility. The result was my complete triumph—a triumph which, in fact, I owed to my defects, and my natural unsuitableness to the character. I recommend actors to ponder well on this reflection, which may, at first sight, seem somewhat paradoxical:—viz. the greatness of a performer depends not more on his acquired advantages than on the defects which he turns to good account.

¹ These remarks would very aptly apply to the works of one of our first contemporary artists in 1840.—ED.

We could ill have spared the success of the “*Victimes cloîtrées*,” for the mal-contents of our company were preparing to forsake us and join the theatre in the Rue Richelieu. In the course of another fortnight they actually took their departure, and unfortunately carried with them one of our authors whom we would not willingly have parted with.

We now felt it necessary to act with redoubled energy and zeal, and I may truly say, that I exerted myself as much as any one. I felt, indeed, a sort of chivalric devotion to the old *Comédie Française*. I cherished for it an attachment like that which a well-born gentleman feels towards the manorial halls of his ancestors, where each escutcheon presents to his eyes a record of glory, and prescribes the observance of a virtue. To maintain the honour of the old house, I endeavoured to surpass myself in Monvel’s play, but my efforts were commensurate rather with my mental energies than to my bodily strength. All Paris pronounced approbation on my performance; I alone knew what the excitement would cost me, and on Monday, the 2nd May, 1791, the play-bills contained the following announcement:—“The third performance of the ‘*Victimes cloîtrées*’ is unavoidably postponed, in consequence of the illness of M. Fleury.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

My illness.—Death of Mirabeau.—A vision.—Change in my personal appearance.—Anecdote of the Marquis de Caraccioli.—Painful recollections.—New organization of the Théâtre Français.—Actors and authors.—Rage for exhibiting the priesthood on the stage.—Bold licence of a musical composer.—Declining state of the French drama.—Change in public taste.—Revival of *Athalie*.—Mummery more attractive than the classic drama.—The reappearance of Preville suggested.—Horrible and extraordinary event.—Preville loses the sight of one eye.—My journey to Senlis.

For the space of a fortnight I lay at the verge of death. It was, however, the protracted crisis of a malady, rather than the malady itself, and the consequence was, that my recovery was as sudden as the attack. I must not omit to mention a singular vision with which I was visited during a fit of feverish delirium, as it serves to prove the great mental excitement under which I laboured. It was either on the day of the second representation

of the "Victimes cloîtrées," or between the first and second, that I was passing through the neighbourhood of the Palais Royal. Just as I had crossed the Pont Neuf, on my way back, I heard a great noise, and looking round, saw a crowd of people falling back on either side, to make way for a horseman, who, pale and agitated, galloped through the midst of them, exclaiming, as he passed along, "He is dead! he is dead! Mirabeau is dead!" Had his countenance expressed any thing but the profound affliction which it seemed to wear, one might have taken him for the king of terrors himself, announcing his great victory. I did not learn who the horseman was, nor whither he was going; but I hurried to the theatre, and was the first to announce to my comrades the death of the celebrated orator, and, in consequence of this circumstance, a sort of vision of the incident haunted me during my fever. At a certain hour, every evening, I fancied I beheld a cavalier, armed *cap-à-pie*, and mounted on a powerful steed, riding full gallop about my chamber. What is still more singular, I felt perfectly conscious all the while that I was *not* looking on a reality. But in spite of this conviction, the vision annoyed me exceedingly. Sometimes his gigantic size would conceal from my view the fire-place, and, as he galloped round the room,

he would hide a large beautiful screen, which I had lately purchased, and which being covered with prints, was a source of amusement to me as I lay in bed. At other times he would "curtail his fair proportions" to the dimensions of a dwarf, and bring his pigmy horse to drink out of my teapot. At one time, I remember both horse and rider plunged into the midst of my cup of barley-water, which annoyed me not a little, as I felt some risk of being choked in the attempt to swallow a captain of dragoons, with his arms and accoutrements.

However, my troublesome apparition at length disappeared. The cavalier first got rid of his horse, then of his arms, and at last withdrew altogether from my presence. My imaginary troubles ceased, however, only to be succeeded by real ones, occasioned by the misfortunes of the *Comédie Française*. But the thought that I was destined to be useful to the establishment, and that my recovery was essential to its interests, supported my strength, and I soon began to mend.

Alas ! poor Fleury ! How woeful was the change which a brief interval of time had wrought upon thine outward man ! Truly I had become a fit representative of the hero of a romantic melo-drame. My countenance was meagre and pallid ; and as to my limbs, it was pitiful to behold them. In order

to make my legs at all tolerable, I was compelled to wear stuffings. I never was engaged on this part of my toilette without thinking of a story told by the Marquis de Caraccioli. Having been reduced almost to a skeleton by a violent illness, the Marquis adopted the plan of wearing four pair of stockings, to give a reasonable degree of bulk to his legs. He told Madame de Boufflers that he had been greatly amused by the simplicity of a rustic booby, whom he had engaged as a valet when he was in the country. The poor fellow was assisting in taking off his master's stockings, and, after pulling off the first and second pair, he was filled with astonishment at the sight of the third; but when he came to the fourth, overcome by dismay, he took to his heels, making the sign of the cross, and exclaiming, in a tone of horror, "Ave Maria! My master has got no legs at all!"

Bitter was the pang I felt when, passing through our lobbies, I saw effaced from the box-doors, the names of those of our comrades who had deserted us. The obliteration of the name of Talma, over which was drawn a broad line of black paint, produced an effect upon me no less painful than the disappearance of some far older names. How are we to account for these contradictory impulses of the human heart? We had disagreed with Talma—we had done all in our power to

render it impossible for him to remain with us, and yet his absence seemed to leave an irreparable void in the theatre. Perhaps it may be that, whilst engaged in strife, we think only of the pleasure of asserting our power, and that it is only after the victory we begin to calculate our losses. Be this as it may, the departure of the young tragedian had shorn our glory of some of its brightest beams, and the daub of paint over the words, "Loge de M. Talma," was as distressing to me as the obliteration of the names of Dugazon, of Mademoiselle Desgarcins, and Madame Vestris. Formerly, in the days of our friendship, I had been in the habit of giving a familiar tap at the door of Dugazon's box, and my comrade never failed to welcome me by some good-humoured sally. I was fool enough to make the wonted signal on the present occasion, first looking round to see that nobody was near, and then sily giving three knocks at the door. The hollow echo of the empty box was the only answer I received, and I glided away with increased dejection.

However, I soon rallied. The Comédie Française, thought I, is still the Comédie Française! Raucourt and Contat had returned to us. Larive, Saint-Prix, Saint-Fal, Bellemont, and Vanhove, were with us. Among our favourite actresses did we not reckon the lively Devienne, the pa-

thetic Petit, and the fascinating Joly? Besides, we were just preparing for Mézerai's *débüt*, and Dupont had produced a powerful sensation by his first appearance. Our veteran corps, and our new recruits, our existing talents, and those *in prospectu* still presented an imposing *ensemble*. Henceforth the Comédie Française would be free to choose its course. Perhaps it might even adopt a new career, and if it failed to augment the glory acquired by the old theatre, it might, at least, succeed in maintaining that glory with dignity.

In spite, too, of our disagreements with some of our authors, we had not been abandoned by them all. Colin d'Harleville remained faithful to us, Andrieux had given us some specimens of his talent, and Peyre still purposed to employ his pen. We were rehearsing young Arnault's "*Marius à Minturnes*," and we calculated on Mercier's joining us. We had, therefore, after all, no great reason to despair, and my successful performance in the "*Victimes cloîtrées*" continued undiminished during each succeeding representation.

Though the success of this play must doubtless be attributed in a great measure to the style in which it was got up, yet a great deal of its attraction was owing to the rage then prevailing for pieces, into which nuns and priests were introduced. All the convents in France were shown

up at the theatres, and the surest mode of drawing money to the treasuries, was to raise a laugh at the expense of the coif. Beaumarchais might ring his changes as long as he chose on the old proverb

“ Il faut que le prêtre vive de l'autel.”

But, truly, it was no longer the priests but the players who lived by it. This practice originated at the Theatre of the Ambigu-Comique. It was in the beautiful pantomime of “Dorothée” the public first hailed the sight of monks and archbishops, and the new license accorded to the stage, caused the example to be speedily followed. The performers at every one of the theatres, great and small, soon found it necessary to include among the articles of their wardrobe, the chasuble, the surplice, the coif and the girdle of Saint Francis. The chaunting of vespers was heard on every stage, and no theatre could dispense with its different orders of clergy. For our part, we had a cardinal in “Charles IX.,” a cardinal in “Louis XII.,” some Chartreux monks in the “Comte de Cominges,” and a groupe of pretty nuns in the “Convent” or “Les Fruits de l’Education.” Even the Comédie Italienne produced the “Rigueurs du Cloître,” and shortly afterwards, or perhaps before, the managers of that theatre

brought out "Vert-vert," a drama of as light a character as the tale of Gresset, from which it is taken. In this piece the composer made use of a musical licence, which in former times would have been deemed an unpardonable scandal. He mixed up in his overture some strains of the Easter Hymn, "O filii et filiæ!" with the somewhat profane *vaudeville*, "Quand je bois du vin Clairet." This impious waggy met with the most signal success.

But Monvel's play was cast in a higher mould. He gave a more elevated view of the abuses of the cloister; he displayed also, as might be expected, admirable skill in stage effect, joined with that sort of eloquence in the dialogue, which was sure to meet approval in those times. One of the boldest incidents of the piece, was that in which a lover breaks through the walls of his prison, and finds his mistress on the outside. The taking of the Bastille had given a taste for this sort of incident, and Grimod de la Reynière would scarcely have ventured to write, at the time of its production, the criticism which he afterwards pronounced on this very scene,—“that it was truly a *masonic catastrophe*.”

But neither the "Victimes Cloîtrées" nor "Marius" restored us to our former prosperity. We had calculated on the performers who remained

with us, and on the authors who still continued friendly to us; but there was another important item of success, which we had lost sight of in our reckoning, namely, the public. Our audiences dwindled away, and though we sometimes obtained full houses, yet it was only by fits and starts, without any uniform course of success. We found that our friends were no longer attracted by good plays, but by what are termed *pièces de circonstance*. The works of our best writers, though performed in the best style, had no charms in comparison with some trumpery piece or second-rate actor identified with the events of the day. The truth is, the revolution, as it had damaged the legitimate government, had ruined the legitimate drama. Whether it was that public attention was absorbed in the great events of those stirring times, or that the number of play-goers was diminished by the extensive emigration of the inhabitants of Paris, especially those of the richer class, I know not; but such was the change, that the *Opéra* was on the point of closing, and the *Théâtre des Italiens* on the eve of bankruptcy. As for ourselves, we were compelled to have recourse to borrowing, but unfortunately while we emptied the purses of our friends, the public did not come to empty theirs into our treasury, and the consequence was, that our supplies were at

length exhausted: a state of things not altogether comfortable to a fraternity who live by their wits.

In this extremity, whilst we were puzzled which way to turn to get out of our difficulties, the *Comédie Italienne* suggested to us an expedient which, all things considered, we thought it would be prudent to adopt. We announced "*Athalie*" with Gossec's choruses. Nearly twenty years before, we had seen that the then novel system of combining music with poetry was not successful; and in spite of the splendid accessories and the talents of the singers, the public regarded the junction as a tasteless medley, by which both arts were injured in the attempt to unite them. It did not, however, follow, that what had been in other days unpopular, might not be admired at a time when nothing was considered real that was not decidedly improbable. Besides, we were not in a position to be over-nice respecting the purity of our rules of art, while the rule of three, daily demonstrated the alarming deficiencies in our treasury.

We therefore decided that music and declamation should unite their powers, and therefore formed a temporary league with our brethren of the *Comédie Italienne*. They came to sing on the stage of the *Théâtre Français*, and we in our turn went to act on the boards of the *Théâtre*

Italien. The novelty of this kind of co-operation excited curiosity, and as, since we had been indulged with the blessings of a revolution, taste for the fine arts had no share in the attraction of the spectacle, we did not hesitate to heighten its attraction by calling in the aid of all sorts of mummary.

We invented a grand ceremony with the pompous title of the "Coronation of Joas." For the due celebration of this scene, all our forces were put in requisition. Our first tragic and our first comic characters, peasants, *soubrettes*, valets, kings, nobles, singers, dramatists, chorists, and dancers, all, down to the very statue in the "Festin de Pierre," and the ghost of *Semiramis*—were disguised as Levites, and distributed in such a manner, that each of the members of one company offered his hand to a member of the other: Molé to Clairval, Contat to Madame Dugazon, Dazincourt to Trial.

Everything went off in the best possible style, and our success was complete. This masquerade, which at any other period would have been denounced as an insult to the public, this burlesque procession connected with a ceremony of a solemn and religious character, this jumbling up of the comedians of the *Malade Imaginaire* with the heroic children of Levi, filled our pit and

excited transports of applause. In short, "Athalie" thus got up, was performed nightly amidst approbation and laughter.

But we began to tremble when we reflected on the extremity to which we were reduced. The supremacy of bad taste is, and always will be, the ruin of the *Comédie Française*. Experience proves that we never shall possess a stage—that we never shall boast of great actors, until the public take a pleasure in the works of our four or five first-rate dramatic writers. Their works are the standards of our dramatic literature, and, with those few exceptions, all is error, fashion, or extravagance. When these writers are neglected, the *Comédie Française* may live in history, but can have no real existence.

Whilst all our classic traditions were thus being effaced by the tyrant hand of dire necessity, an idea occurred to me which I thought might turn out well. I fancied that a resurrection of Préville to theatrical life might recal the public to our theatre, or, at least, bring back to us that class of real amateurs, whom Larive had already in some degree aroused. The only question was, whether Préville himself would lend himself to the arrangement. We dared scarcely venture to hope that he would consent to abandon the calm rural retirement in which he lived, beloved and re-

spected by all around him, and again subject his first-rate talents and honoured age to the whims and caprices of a public, whose taste must have appeared to himself incapable of appreciating his worth.

Nevertheless, it occurred to me, that the ambition natural to every actor, and the gratification of being the glorious instrument of restoring good taste, might not be without their influence on Préville. This idea was strengthened by the recent occurrence of a very extraordinary and melancholy event, which had been the means of depriving the great comedian of his favourite diversion of shooting.

In the town of Senlis, to which Préville had retired, there was a society of great antiquity, to which many of the citizens belonged. It was called the "Arquebuss Society," and its members met annually on the occasion of one of the great religious festivals, and marched in procession to the parish church, bearing their banner, for the purpose of having it blessed¹.

¹ Holding Protestant opinions this sounds strangely. What should *we* think if we heard that the Jockey Club sent their books from Mr. Weatherby's, to be blessed in the church of St. Martin's in the Fields at the beginning of the season; or that the targets of the Toxopholites were paraded to Paddington for a similar purpose?—ED.

Préville, having received an invitation to be present at this ceremony, proceeded to the house of the captain, and there joined the procession. Suddenly, at the turning of a street, the report of fire-arms was heard, and a person in the procession near Préville fell dead by his side. Other shots followed in quick succession, killing or wounding several members of the society. The consternation and alarm which this circumstance occasioned may be easily imagined. The ranks of the procession were thrown into the greatest disorder, the spectators mingled with them in the utmost confusion, not knowing which way to fly to escape the peril. Meanwhile, the invisible assassin, no longer able to select his victims, continued his work of slaughter by firing at random among the crowd.

Speedily, however, it was discovered, from the uniform direction of the firing, that it proceeded from the windows of a neighbouring house, the blinds of which were closed. This was the residence of a clock-maker, who had been a short time previously expelled from the "Arquebuss Society." The secret was thus at once explained. The indignant multitude immediately rushed to his house, and breaking open the door and lower windows, proceeded to search for the assassin, who had ceased firing, and had hidden himself. The crisis of this horrible catastrophe was now

impending. While every part of the building was crowded by people, occupied in searching for the hidden murderer, a subterraneous mine exploded with a tremendous shock. The house was blown into the air, shivered into a thousand atoms, and mingled with the shattered limbs of the unfortunate people it contained. The wretch who had conceived and executed this atrocious scheme of vengeance, fell a victim to his own crime; not an atom of his remains was found.

Préville happened to be situated directly in front of the house when the firing commenced, and the first shot passed close to him. Though it did not actually strike him, yet it was near enough to produce a violent shock in his left eye, followed by a sensation of great pain. He put up his hand; there was no blood, nor was any wound discernible, yet the power of vision was gone. The surgeon who attended him declared that a ball had grazed the pupil, and paralyzed the nerve; but whether this opinion were correct or not, Préville had reason to congratulate himself that he had only lost the sight of one of his eyes, instead of sharing the death which was so unmercifully dealt out to those around him.

The idea of inviting Préville, even with his eye out, to make his reappearance, was eagerly seized

by my comrades, and I was commissioned to make the proposition to him. Accordingly I set out for Senlis, not without an uneasy feeling of anxiety lest I should fail in the object of my mission. Well, thought I, will Prévillé listen to my proposition? I have reason to hope he will. But his wife—she, I know, was earnestly devoted to the *Comédie Française*. I think I may gain her over to my cause. No doubt of it. I may even prevail on her to join us. It would indeed be a master-stroke to bring back both of them. I will revive the cherished recollections of the one, excite the imagination of the other, and appeal to the hearts of both. Such were the speculations in which I indulged during my journey to Senlis.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The flag of thoughts and wishes.—Favourite associates of retired comedians.—Saint Amand the provincial actor.—Harpagon.—A contrast.—The genius of avarice.—An inconsistency detected in Molière's "Avare."—Signor Zaccharelli.—Anecdote of King Ferdinand VII.—Boucher the Fiddle player.—Ferdinand's violin-playing.—His vanity, and artifice.—Champein.—His interesting reminiscences—His performance at the Prince de Condé's theatre.—Friendship between him and General Hoche.—Revolutionary calamities.—Death of Madame Préville.

THERE are certain external signs and circumstances which enable an attentive observer to discern the wishes which occupy a man's mind; that is to say, those wishes which are habitually cherished, and have passed as it were into the chronic stage. Moreover, nature betrays externally, not only the present engrossing object of our thoughts, but also that to which we look forward in perspective. There is a direct analogy between our position of to-day and that which we wish it should

be to-morrow. Manners and gestures betray the wishes no less distinctly than they do the passions. In allusion to this sort of precursory indication of our thoughts, a man, distinguished for discrimination, has observed, "In vain we seek to dissemble, our gestures unfurl the flag which proclaims our thoughts and wishes."

It was precisely thus with Prévillo, who unconsciously to himself had unfurled his flag before me, and it was floating with a favourable breeze in the direction of the Comédie Française. The great actor could not conceal from me his longings to return among us. Nor was it in one way only that this hankering after his old occupation was rendered obvious ; it betrayed itself in a thousand minute particulars. There was always a trace of one or other of his favourite characters about him ; and it depended on the company he was in, whether he was to act the *Doctor*, in the "Cercle," the *Marquis*, in the "Legacy," *Figaro*, *Antoine*, or the *Bourru bien-faisant*. It was only necessary to know who was coming to visit him, and you might instantly guess from his dress and manner the part which he would presently assume. If he had to receive more than one visitor, provided their characters were not very opposite, he would mould himself alternately to the disposition of each. He

would be as it were black on the right side, and white on the left, skipping from one to the other in thought, much in the same way as Socio skips over his lantern, and assumes alternately the voice of the ambassador, and the falsetto of *Alcmène*.

But all these changes were so lightly touched that they were almost imperceptible to ordinary observers, and were only to be detected by those who well know *Préville*, or who, like myself, indulged in the whim of looking for the *aërial perspective* of the mind.

Another peculiarity of a more obvious kind I have observed among all retired players, whose thoughts, after two or three years trial of their new mode of life, invariably fall back upon past recollections which tend to spoil their present reality. For example:—they take pleasure in being surrounded by persons of marked character,—originals, who seem to have formed themselves on the pattern of some striking dramatic heroes.

In company with such persons time never hangs heavily. Their originality sets dulness at defiance; and it seems as if the Muse of Comedy collected these groups around her retired votaries for the sake of providing them with a court composed of the models they once observed and imitated.

Préville's liberality and goodness of heart, joined to his natural partiality for companions of this original stamp, brought them frequently about him. Amidst his quiet country neighbours, by whom he was daily visited, they looked like characters who had slipped off the stage after the fall of the curtain.

One of these was a constant inmate of Préville's house. His name was Saint-Amand, who had formerly been a provincial actor. He could no longer get his living by his professional talents, almost every manager in France having refused him. What was he to do? Saint-Amand was not the man to be long puzzled by such a question. One night, at a somewhat unseasonable hour, Préville's door-bell was heard to ring. It could be no visitor at such a time, and all the servants were at home. Who could be the ringer. Préville having ordered somebody to open the door, a long, thin, shabby-looking stranger glided in, crying out, "'Tis I! 'tis I!" and groping his way till he came to a bed-chamber, he pounced upon Préville, who was in his bed with Madame, and embraced them one after the other, exclaiming all the time—

"'Tis I, *parbleu!* 'tis I!"

"What! you?" exclaimed the astonished Préville.

“What! you?” repeated his indignant wife.

“Yes, I,” rejoined the intruder; “your friend, your former colleague, Saint-Amand! I am come to request your hospitality for a night.”

“Ah! It is you, Saint-Amand, is it?” said Préville (who always recognised those who came to seek favours of him). “Very well, very well, you shall have it.”

Saint-Amand had by this time seated himself without any ceremony, and was busy unbuttoning his muddy gaiters, when a servant, who had been rung for, appeared.

“Get the spare bed-room up stairs ready for this gentleman,” said Préville. “Get a mattress, and”

“ and put a feather bed on the top, if you please,” interrupted Saint-Amand.

“Come, make haste,” said Préville; “fetch the bed-clothes!”

“And mind that the sheets are well aired,” added Saint-Amand.

“Get the warming-pan,” said Préville.

“Yes, and bring up a basin of sugar with it,” added Saint-Amand.

“Adieu! good night!” said Préville.

“Adieu! adieu!” returned his guest. “Don’t mind *me*; one night is soon over.”

This one night’s lodging was prolonged to a

visit of nineteen years, during which time Saint-Amand lived on the same free and easy terms under the roof of his good-natured host.

Another inmate of Préville's house was one who afforded a strong contrast to Saint-Amand, who was in heart a miser. He was of a totally opposite character : all self-denial, benevolence, and charity. This excellent man was a priest, verging on his ninetieth year. He had long been the attached friend of Préville, and when the latter quitted the stage, he resigned his benefice at Villiers, near Paris, to take up his abode with his friend the actor, to whom, as to a son, he consigned the care of his latter days.

The good M. de Villiers (for so we used to call him, from the name of his benefice), was just such a pastor as Lafontaine was a poet. Those who have seen Molé, in the "*Vieux célibataire*," have seen M. de Villiers,—it was his portrait to the life : simplicity, modesty, cheerfulness, and good temper, were his attributes. He was as indulgent as if he had been himself a sinner; yet his life was one of unsullied purity. It is not quite impossible that in early youth he might have sinned against the rigour of ecclesiastical laws, for at the head of his bed, there certainly *did* hang the portrait of a lady. It was drawn in crayons, and the colours were somewhat blurred.

I have heard it said that this partial obliteration had been caused by the tears of the worthy priest ; but that was told only in a whisper, and the tell-tale raised his finger to his lips as he spoke.

Between this excellent man and Saint-Amand there was not one point of resemblance, and, as might be expected, the ex-comedian was often very jealous of the favour enjoyed by the retired *curé*. It was curious to see them in company together, particularly when playing cards. They were then like fire and water. Whenever Saint-Amand had a good hand, he became quite elated ; his eyes sparkled with delight, and his ruffles, which for want of starch usually hung like weeping willows over his wrists, actually shook for joy. On the other hand, if the game went against him, his vexation was sure to betray itself in the compressed action of his lips, or he would hum a tune, and beat time with his foot on the toe of the person sitting next him. When this happened to be M. de Villiers, he would turn to him in his usual gentle manner, and entreat him to spare his corns, and he would in return for the favour play as badly against him as he could wish.

Avarice is essentially an odious and revolting vice, but when practised as it was by Saint-Amand, it became almost an effort of genius. It might be said that he possessed the passion more than

he was possessed by it. He was born a miser, just as other men are born generals, or artists, and he had perfected the gift of nature by the advantages derived from experience, constant observation, and daily practice. If avarice were an art, Saint-Amand might have professed it. Nobody knew better than *he* how to make his friends pay for him the toll of a bridge or the fee for keeping his walking-stick; how to manage so as to have nothing but large money when small change was required, or to find nothing in his pocket but a small piece when a large one was wanted. He could have given the cleverest manœuvrer a lesson in the best mode of avoiding the presentation of a new-year's or a Christmas' gift, or the art of selling an old coat to a Jew.

Aided by this profound knowledge of art, Saint-Amand detected a fault in Molière's "Avare." It will be remembered that in the third act of that admirable comedy, *Cléante* succeeds in presenting *Marianne* with a ring belonging to *Harpagon*, who shows that he is not very well pleased. Consequently, it might naturally be expected that he would not let the subject drop quietly.

"Why," asked Saint-Amand, "is there nothing more said about the ring? Are we to believe that the father who would not consent to the marriage

without stipulating for a wedding-suit for himself, would not demand the restoration of his ring—his valuable ring!—a superb diamond? Why, Sir, Molière's *Miser* was an *extravagant prodigal!*" This remark has not suggested itself to any of our critics.

Signor Zaccharelli was another of Prévile's visitors, nay, he was his friend, and well did he deserve to be so. He was a young musician of first-rate talent, whose genius coincided with that of our gifted comrade. I have heard him relate many amusing anecdotes. The following will, I trust, not be unacceptable to my readers. It possesses almost historical interest, as it relates to King Ferdinand of Spain.

That monarch was afflicted with the mania of wishing to pass for an eminent musician. During his residence in France, he took pleasure in assembling a number of musicians about him, at the royal domain which Napoleon had been considerate enough to give him in exchange for his kingdom. He conferred the title of first violin of his household on Boucher,—the impetuous Boucher. Grand concerts were sometimes got up at the court of Valençay, but more frequently quartet parties; on which occasions Ferdinand would claim for himself the first part, allotting the second to the great performer, but this was

not all. The monarch uniformly reached the bottom of the page long before the other performers, then stopping short, he would fold his arms, and shrug his shoulders with an expression, which, if rendered into words, would seem to stigmatise his companions as a set of "lazy dogs!"

At first no notice was taken of this; on the contrary, the other fiddlers tried hard to keep pace with the King, as the leader of an orchestra seeks to follow a singer. But all in vain! the second fiddle, and the two other instruments, were always behind, as a matter of course. At length, as the first fiddle showed no symptoms of relaxing his speed, Boucher grew somewhat impatient, and feeling himself sovereign enough in his art to be able to treat the King on equal terms, under the circumstances, intimated to his *Primo* the necessity of counting the rests. "Count rests!" exclaimed the offended *Primo*, remembering that he was a King just at the moment when he should have forgotten it;—"Count rests! Do you expect me to condescend to the drudgery of counting rests¹?"

¹ This is like the story of Old Astley, who, when he saw at rehearsal the two French horn players in his band remaining silent, ordered them to play; and upon their answering that they could not, because there was a rest of fifteen bars; cried out with an oath,—“Rest, you vagabones; do you think I am going to pay you ten shillings a week for resting?—Puff away, you vagabones.”—ED.

That proneness to artifice, which was unfortunately a prominent trait in the character of Ferdinand, suggested to him the following stratagem, for the gratification of his musical vanity. How many a visitor to the court of Valençay has listened with admiration and delight to the playing of the King of Spain. His vigorous bowing, his perfect intonation and purity of tone, the tenderness of his *andante*, and the spirit of his *allegretto*, have excited raptures. But Kings possess resources unknown to ordinary men, and when Ferdinand received the adulation of his auditors, standing with an air of modesty at the other end of the room, and relieved *en profile* against a rich japanned screen, what was he doing? The King of the two Spains and the two Indies was drawing his bow in the air; and the auditors were charmed by the skill of Boucher, who executed all the difficult passages while concealed behind the screen.

After this display, and while the room resounded with expressions of admiration, while the enthusiasm of all was at its height, the royal trickster would step forward, in the coolest manner possible, to receive the rapturous applause bestowed on his sham solo ¹.

¹ This history we utterly discredit : the flourish of M. FLEURY on this matter, savours greatly of the "*Bow ideal*."—ED.

I must now inform the reader, that my friend Zaccharelli, from whom I had the above anecdotes, the celebrated Italian *Signor*, whose performances at the Théâtre de Monsieur elicited such admiration, bore the name of Zaccharelli by assumption. He was an Italian only because at that theatre no music would be listened to unless it was believed to come from the other side of the Alps. Accordingly, the gay and melodious Provençal, whom his friends called Champein at the Opéra Comique, was known by the name of Zaccharelli at the Théâtre de Monsieur ¹.

Champein still lives, though somewhat less gay and handsome than when Favart sketched his portrait in the following quatrain:—

“ Lubin est d’une figure
 Qui met tout le monde en train ;
 Sa gaieté naïve et pure,
 Annonce un cœur sans chagrin.”

How interesting are his reminiscences. If collected, what a rich fund of amusement they would

¹ This repudiation of his country by M. Champein reminds us of the denial of an Irish boy, who was trying to get a place, that he *was* an Irish boy,—“ I don’t know what you mean by not being an Irishman,” said the gentleman who was about hiring him ; “ but *this* I know, you were born in Ireland.” “ Och, your honour, if that’s all,” said the boy, “ small blame to that. Suppose I had been born in a stable, would I have been a horse ?”—ED.

present, from the period of his departure from Salons, with his *motet* in his pocket, down to the triumph of his beautiful *Mélomanie*. With what interest I have listened to the descriptions he has given me of his visits to Prévillè and to the Prince de Condé, at whose private theatre he used frequently to play comic parts. With what amusing naïveté I have heard him relate the embarrassment he felt at being obliged to address with familiarity, and even to scold, the Princess de Condé, who performed the waiting-maid's parts. Then, again, how delightful it was to hear him tell us of the friendship which, in later times, during our great political struggles, he contracted with Hoche—a friendship which was given and received like that of brothers—a friendship which reflected honour on them both, and whose link was broken only by death ¹.

But, to return to a less agreeable subject—on word more of Saint-Amand. That worthy personage, having succeeded to some property, quitted Prévillè's hospitable roof, after the lengthened visit I have mentioned. The coach which was to convey him away was standing at the door, and he

¹ This puff seems to indicate the appearance, at no remote period, of M. Champein's *Memoirs*, written most probably by somebody who never heard his name till he began the book.—ED

was busily occupied in observing that each little packet was carefully stowed in its proper place.

“Are you sure you have left nothing behind?” said Prévile.

“Oh! thank you for reminding me,” replied Saint-Amand. “I have forgotten my warming-pan!”

“There are several in the house,” observed one of the servants; “which of them is yours?”

“Oh! the best!” was the selfish reply.

The venerable de Villiers took leave in a different way, and his departure was not voluntary. During our political disorders he became, from some cause or other, obnoxious to the dislike of the ruling powers, and in the eighty-first year of his age, he was sent to the state-prison at Chantilly.

Prévile was inconsolable for the loss of his old and valued friend; and Madame Prévile, who had already suffered great affliction from the calamities which desolated her family, and pressed so heavily on France, was unable to bear up against this last painful blow. She died of a broken heart, in August, 1794.

I have allowed myself to wander very far from the point whence I started at the commencement of this chapter; but I must beg permission to

continue a little longer in the same digressive course. Will the reader, therefore, do me the favour to imagine, that having stopped to rest half-way on my road to Senlis, a gloomy sybil whom I consulted respecting the issue of my negotiation, spun out her answer with a detail of the lamentable affliction which, at a subsequent period, befel our great comedian. This curious example of mental hallucination the reader will find described in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Préville's pecuniary misfortunes.—He re-appears at the Comédie Française.—His performance of the *Mercure Galant* at a very advanced age.—Préville's daughter, Madame Guesdon.—Extraordinary circumstances related by her.—Singular hallucination.—Préville fancied himself a prisoner.—His conversations with imaginary personages.—Sketching likenesses.—Visionary scene described by Préville to his daughter.—Madame Guesdon's efforts to cure his hallucination.—Well-contrived device.—Its success.—Actors released from the ban of excommunication.—Result of my visit to Senlis.—Re-appearance of Préville and his wife.

THE political convulsion which agitated France, shattered the fortune of Préville, as well as of thousands. He of course lost his court-pension, and witnessed the wreck of the Comédie Française, and with it the destruction of the security for dividends, founded on the existence and previously apparent perpetuity of the association. The death of his wife gave the *coup-de-grâce* to

his misfortunes. Deprived of the partner of his heart and home, and with an income reduced to the uncertain payment of the revenues of his landed property, he came to Paris, to solicit from the government of the Directory the restoration of his pensions. His application was rejected. It was then that he again performed awhile for his former comrades. I did not quite approve of this last return to the stage, and on that point my opinion coincided with those of his nephew Champville, who was one of our associates, and of Dazincourt. But with a resolution like that of Molière, who insisted on performing the “*Malade imaginaire*,” and died under the exertion, Prévile would take no refusal; “I have never separated my fate,” said he, “from that of my comrades. Tell me that they are prospering, and I will retire.”

Alas! no one could conscientiously tell him that. He made this last re-appearance when in the seventy-sixth or seventy-seventh year of his age, and, singularly enough, it was in the “*Mercure galant*,” the first character he ever played, that he closed his active and honourable career.

Prévile’s daughter, Madame Guesdon, had shortly before quitted Paris, her husband having been appointed to the office of receiver-general at Beauvais. There, after a distressing interval of

mental aberration, in the course of which he entirely lost his sight, Préville ended his days, soothed by the tenderest cares which filial affection could bestow. Madame Guesdon possessed a beautiful house, a few leagues distant from the town of Beauvais. Thither she conducted her father, and never quitted him until his death.

The extraordinary and interesting circumstances attending Préville's hallucinations of mind, have been variously related, and often exaggerated. I learnt the real truth of the case from Madame Guesdon herself, and now present them to the reader just as I received them.

Préville had been deeply affected by the atrocities of the reign of terror, which, during the period of his mental aberration, were ever present to his mind. Amidst his fits of delusion he fancied that he was imprisoned by the revolutionists, and that he saw in his confinement all the great and august victims whose tragical deaths he had deplored. At those times it was singular to observe that, while keeping up a varied conversation with those visionary beings, and replying to questions which he heard only in imagination, poor Préville was deaf to the voice of his daughter, or that of anybody else near him, even that of his physician, to whom he always paid a marked respect.

Whilst he continued under the influence of

these delusions, it was impossible to withdraw his attention from some fancied narrative to which he seemed to be earnestly listening, and which he would occasionally interrupt by the most rational reflections, or lively and spirited remarks. At other times he would take his pencil, and fancy he was sketching the portraits of some of the celebrated men of the eighteenth century, whom he believed were sitting to him for their pictures, and he often addressed himself to them as if they had been actually present. Blind as he had now been for two or three years, he seemed to see his imaginary visitors clearly enough, and would occasionally rally them on the form and colour of their antiquated garments, or gallantly compliment the ladies on the freshness and elegance of their dresses.

During the continuance of the paroxysm (which generally lasted for two consecutive days and nights), he took no food, nor even a moment's repose. In his features, which were admirably expressive, were painted sensations of joy and grief, or deep sympathy. At length his countenance would become as red as fire; the veins of his forehead would swell almost to bursting, and the whole scene would wind up with a flow of unintelligible words, at first forcibly articulated, but growing gradually fainter, until the exhausted

speaker sank into a state of torpor. He would then sleep for fifteen or eighteen hours successively, without changing his position.

On awaking from these lengthened slumbers, Préville appeared calm, and recognised the voices of his family and friends, whom he would fervently thank for having come to see him in his prison. He used to express his fears for their safety, and would repeat to them the conversations he had held with his fancied companions in captivity. These were the most interesting recitals imaginable, consisting of true anecdotes, admirably well told—the fruits of his recollections, and of his long and familiar intercourse with the best society.

Meantime the unfortunate sufferer was visibly wasting in bodily health, being absorbed with the one idea of his constant imprisonment. The unwearied efforts made by Madame Guesdon to eradicate this idea were unavailing. In spite of his utter blindness, Préville fancied he beheld distinctly before him his prison bars, his gaolers, the commissioners of the Convention, and his fellow-captives. In vain did his daughter lead him into her garden to inhale the perfume of the flowers, or drive with him through the park in an open carriage, beneath the enlivening rays of the mid-day sun; wherever he went he was sensible

to nothing but the icy coldness and the damp vapour of a dungeon.

One day he threw the whole household into alarm. He had been left in a state of perfect tranquillity, when he was observed suddenly stealing away from the apartment which he occupied, casting a look of terror behind him, trembling from head to foot, and with his countenance as pale as death. On hearing the voice of his daughter, he rushed to her, and seemed to seek in her arms a shelter from the hand which he imagined was about to slay him.

“Ah! hide me,” he exclaimed, “hide me! Don’t let them catch me! . . . I hear them coming!”

“No, my dearest father, it is nothing.”

“They are here, I tell you!” said he. “But they will not find me. Hide me in your arms. ’Twas thus that Loiserolles was saved! Yes, I am safe with you!”

Then, sinking exhausted into an arm-chair, he addressed Madame Guesdon with an expression of terror and earnestness, as follows:

“The fatal car was going to the place of execution—I was in it, but not alone; a mother and her son were beside me . . . old age and childhood! What merciless butchery! We were moving along; each motion of the car shook every nerve of our frames! Oh! the odious

sound of those horrid wheels! Little can you imagine the horror of counting each turn as they rolled on. It is as though the car were crushing the heart within you. Oh! to approach death thus," cried he, straining his daughter closely to his breast, "to approach death thus is worse than death itself!"

"But you have escaped, father! you are safe," repeated the affectionate daughter, tenderly caressing him, while she mentally implored Heaven to recall his wandering reason, and relieve his sufferings.

"Yes," he replied, "I am safe; but for how long? Hear me! You do not know all! I heard the fatal car stop at the place of execution. I did not dare to look; I prayed and thought of you. Presently I heard heavy footsteps descending from the scaffold, and then going up again. A cry now arose from the crowd; it was a cry of insult to the victim. I heard once more the footsteps descending, and then re-ascending. . . . It was my turn next; they led me forward, but just as I was beginning to mount the steps which led to the scaffold, a powerful naked arm was suddenly thrust out before me like a barrier. I looked up, and beheld . . . the executioner!"

Here Prévile assumed by turns the rude accents of an executioner and the feeble voice of the al-

ready half-expiring victim. His imitative powers thus enabled him to give a vivid picture of the appalling scene and the terrific actors in it, whilst he repeated to his daughter the following dialogue :

“ Where are you going ? ”

“ Going ? Why ask that cruel question ?
. . . Oh ! ’tis barbarous to prolong . . . ”

“ None of your nonsense ! Where are you going, citizen, I say ? ”

“ I go to rejoin my companions in misfortune.
. . . I go to pray to Heaven for my family. ”

“ That’s all very fine ; but you don’t pass here ! ”

“ Not pass ! What do you mean ? ”

At this point of the dialogue the expression of Préville’s countenance lighted up, as if indicating a ray of hope.

“ I mean, you don’t pass, to be sure, without your number. ”

“ My number ? ”

“ Ay, to be sure. Is the old fool mad ! The queerest fellow I ever had to deal with. Do you think people are to be guillotined in this irregular manner ? Show us your number ! ”

“ I beg your pardon. I . . . I was not aware of the custom. I have no number. ”

“ You must look for it. ”

“ It’s easy to talk of looking for it. You tie us up in a convenient fashion for searching, truly. ”

(Here Prévillé held out his hands, which he kept close together, as if they had been bound.) “ You can search me yourself. . . . May I not come yet? . . . ”

Here ensued a scene of altercation between the supposed victim and the executioner, which ended by the latter angrily thrusting the old man away, desiring him to go and look for his number.

“ A pretty joke, truly ! for a fellow to come here to be guillotined without his number ! ”

“ You may easily suppose,” added the poor visionary, in winding up his narration, “ that I did not wait for a second order to depart.”

This story, with its horrifying commencement and its tragi-comic conclusion, was not the last of the same singular kind which the afflicted veteran was destined to relate. A return of those fatal visions was to be apprehended ; for Prévillé, as I have already mentioned, saw every thing in imagination, and was conscious of his real blindness only during his lucid moments. In a short time he fancied that he was again made prisoner, and it therefore became necessary to use every device to change the train of his ideas, which still continued to run round in the same circle of horrors. Madame Guesdon, who was a very intelligent person, and who loved her father with genuine filial tenderness, perceived that constant contradiction only

tended to confirm the old man the more strongly in his deplorable hallucinations. She therefore conceived the idea of pretending to enter into his ideas, and humour his imagination so as to be able to direct it to a certain result of which she had formed the plan. She told him one morning that she had for some time hoped that the blindness with which he was afflicted would have enabled her to deceive him on the painful subject of his captivity, but that it was now no longer possible to conceal the fact, as she had just received intimation that the day appointed for his trial was at hand, and it was therefore necessary to prepare for it.

Prévillé listened to this communication with marked attention and anxiety. At the same time it was evidently a consolation to him to be able to open his heart on the subject of his misfortunes to his daughter, whose obstinate denial of his melancholy condition had hitherto greatly annoyed him. On the following day Madame Guesdon informed him that he had received permission to have an advocate and a counsel of his own choosing, with whom he might freely communicate; a favour which augured well for his case, and which had not been granted to the other prisoners. Prévillé's spirits evidently revived at this information; hope seemed to dawn upon him,

and cheer his heart, which had so long been the prey of despair.

Madame Guesdon lost no time in introducing into the imaginary prison an advocate, whose celebrity was well known to Prévile, but with whose voice he was unacquainted. This part was performed by the registrar of the Criminal Tribunal of Sénonais, an acquaintance of Madame de Guesdon's son. He was a young man of talent, and well versed in the practical department of the various branches of jurisprudence. This pretended advocate brought along with him a brother lawyer, described to be no less celebrated than himself, and whom Prévile, as soon as he heard his name, received with a most joyous welcome. This part was enacted by a young lawyer. These two grave personages began by expressing a difference of opinion regarding a point of great importance to the case, which they warmly discussed, each appealing to the criminal code, and citing quotations from different laws in support of his own view. All this was done with the greatest possible seriousness, every precaution being taken to avoid the least appearance of trickery, which Prévile's quick perception would instantly have detected. A long and learned debate was carried on between the two lawyers, and the result was, that the advocate and the counsel came to a

mutual understanding, and declared it to be their concurring opinion, that even if the prisoner were convicted of the offence laid to his charge, he could not, under any pretext, be condemned to capital punishment.

This declaration greatly relieved Préville with respect to the issue of the trial, and removed from his mind a melancholy weight, for his imagination was always brooding over the horrors of the scaffold. The lawyers having agreed together on the line of defence, retired to draw up a memorial which they stated their intention of circulating very extensively, and from which they expected the happiest results. On that evening, for the first time during a very long period, the patient enjoyed a calm and refreshing slumber. Next morning, as soon as he awoke, Madame Guesdon informed him that she had been waiting on all his judges, and that she had found several of them very favourably disposed towards him, while those who were the most inimical had shown themselves accessible to bribery, which she had employed with no sparing hand. In short, she assured him that everything promised well for his cause.

The stratagem was now progressing towards its consummation. The next scene in the drama was ushered in by the voice of a public crier calling

news outside the house: all pretended to listen eagerly—other criers followed the first: the windows were thrown open, and Préville distinguished his own name. Further attention enabled him to make out the words,—“*Justificatory memorial of the worthy citizen Préville, the friend and father of the poor, unjustly accused,*” &c. &c. And he heard the people outside asking for the memorial, and asserting the innocence of the accused. Préville was moved to tears, and he became more and more tranquillized, whilst the ready ingenuity of Madame Guesdon thus offered daily, and almost momentarily, fresh encouragement to his hopes.

The day of trial, so anxiously looked for, at length arrived. All the necessary arrangements had been previously made under the directions of the Registrar of the Criminal Tribunal, who performed the part of advocate for Préville. The judges were seated in the great Hall of Bresces, where the *Comtes Evêques* of Beauvais formerly sat in judgment. The audience was composed of the inhabitants of the village, who were collected in great numbers, while others were dispersed through the capacious hall of the château to represent the people who had come to see the prisoner pass, and to encourage him by their vociferations.

At length Préville, pale and agitated, was seen

advancing, supported by his daughter and his grandson. As soon as he made his appearance, he was welcomed by a general acclamation from the people, which the president immediately repressed. Silence being restored, the process commenced, and was conducted with all the regularity of a real trial. The usual forms were observed: the interrogatory, the examination of witnesses, cross-examination, pleadings, and replies—nothing was omitted that could give an air of completeness to the ceremony. During the whole of the proceedings, Prévillé exhibited signs of the greatest anxiety, and listened with breathless attention. At length, he could contain himself no longer, but bursting into tears he exclaimed:

“Ah! Gentlemen, is it possible that you can think me guilty of violating the laws of the republic? If I were indeed criminal, what, think you, would the august Empress of all the Russias say? If it were really so, the illustrious Catherine would take my little marble bust, which stands upon her table, and order it to be dragged through all the kennels in St. Petersburg.”

The audience cautiously restrained their inclination to laugh at this ludicrous appeal: this *imperial* argument, addressed to a presumed republican tribunal. All preserved their gravity. The president complimented the prisoner on his

happy defence, and the jury retired to deliberate on their verdict.

The sequel may be easily guessed ; the jury returned a unanimous verdict of “not guilty,” and joyous echoes of “not guilty! not guilty!” resounded on every side. Prévile was immediately surrounded and congratulated by his numerous friends, and afterwards carried home in his arm-chair across his garden, which, amidst the confusion of voices around him, he mistook for crowded streets. “Make way! make way!” shouted his bearers, as if impeded by the vast concourse of people, and poor Prévile fancied himself returning in triumph to the bosom of his family, to dream once more (as he afterwards expressed himself to Dangeville) of the stage and the days of his former glory.

Never after, did he exhibit the slightest trace of that mental aberration, which for the space of two years had rendered his existence truly miserable.

The above curious facts were related to me by Madame Guesdon herself, and having made notes of them immediately, I may with tolerable accuracy affirm, that I have here given them almost in the words of the narrator¹.

¹ Nothing in the world is to be doubted ; because it is said that nothing in the world is impossible except gunpowder ashes ; but this history, genuine as it *doubtlessly* is, does certainly stagger me.—ED.

I will now wind up this chapter, by describing what occurred on my visit to Prévile, at Senlis. On my arrival at Prévile's, I felt somewhat at a loss how to open the subject of my embassy. I tried hard to get Prévile alone for a few moments, but Madame, who suspected that there was some secretscheme in agitation, always contrived to throw herself in the way. Though I had arrived at an early hour, and had been watching for an opportunity the whole day, yet I could not succeed in turning the conversation into the channel I wished. At length the worthy M. de Villiers smoothed the way for me, though quite unconsciously.

After taking coffee, we retired to the garden. Prévile and I were sitting on the same bench, and the good priest was seated in his arm-chair, which was always carried into the garden for his use. Madame Prévile was at a little distance from us, walking up and down, and casting a glance at us every now and then, like a sentinel keeping watch. There was a general silence among us. It was a splendid evening; the sun was setting most majestically amidst festoons of gilded clouds, while a fresh and balmy breeze softly played among the trees. The leaves were already tinged with the yellow hue of autumn, and some of them fell at our feet. I amused myself by picking them up and examining them, while I puzzled my brain for a favourable theme of conversation; but, alas!

neither the setting sun, nor gilded clouds, the balmy zephyr, nor the yellow leaf would furnish what I sought.

“How lovely is the face of heaven to-night!” exclaimed M. de Villiers.

“Yes, it is indeed,” replied I, without lifting my eyes from the leaf, which I pretended to examine with the searching eye of a botanist.

“But look at it, Fleury,” said Prévile; “an actor may look at heaven now, for it is now open to you.”

“What are you talking about?” said Madame Prévile, suddenly advancing to the spot where we were sitting.

“Madame!” said I, with the quickness of a fencer who has found at last an opportunity for a lunge, “Prévile has justly observed that heaven is now open to players. The National Assembly, though subjecting us to persecutions on earth, has nevertheless granted an indemnity by allowing us to hope for entrance into paradise.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Madame Prévile eagerly, “is it then decreed that there is to be no more ex-communication?”

“It is said a decree, passed six months ago, has restored to players all the ecclesiastical rights and privileges, of which antiquated prejudice had deprived them.”

M. de Villiers took both my hands in his, and congratulated me on the passing of a law which would remove a thousand sources of annoyance, and which, above all, placed within our reach the nuptial benediction.

This view of the matter gave a turn to the conversation, which greatly strengthened my hold on Prévile, who had renounced his profession for the sake of being enabled to espouse Madame, but who now perceived that, under the new order of things, theatrical fame and conjugal felicity were no longer incompatible. I will not repeat all the arguments and persuasions I had recourse to for the furtherance of the object I had in view; suffice it to say that, six weeks after my visit to Senlis, Prévile performed with greater éclat than ever in the “*Partie de Chasse*,” and that Madame herself re-assumed the character in which she had formerly appeared with so much success.

CHAPTER XXX.

Play-bills.—Effect of the Revolution on the French Stage.—Republican censorship.—Beaux, Tape-durs, and Muscadins.—An agreeable change for the Théâtre Français.—Reaction in public feeling.—Laya.—His play, called “l’Ami des Lois.”—The Performance prohibited by the Municipality of Paris.—Disturbance in the Theatre.—M. Chambou, the Mayor of Paris.—Bon-mot of Madame de Staël.—Decision of the Convention, on the subject of the “Ami des Lois.”—Triumphant performance of the piece.—Sudden improvement of Picard as a Dramatic writer.—Debût of Baptiste the elder.—Marevaux, as a Dramatist.—“Pamela.”—Its performance prohibited.—Order respecting Sticks and Swords.—An improved auditory.—Interruption of the performance.—The Comédie Française denounced to the Jacobinical Society.—The Theatre surrounded by the Military.—The performers arrested.

THE idea has frequently occurred to me, that a collection of play-bills, from the earliest period of the French stage to the present time, would furnish the most valuable annals of our history. The play-bills printed during the Revolution are

truly curious records. The following marks something more than a mere date :—

“ BY ORDER OF THE PEOPLE !

THE COMEDIANS OF THE NATIONAL THEATRE
WILL THIS DAY PERFORM,

FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE WIDOWS
AND CHILDREN
OF OUR BRETHREN WHO FELL ON THE
10th AUGUST,

GUILLAUME TELL,”

&c. &c.

The great political question was at length decided. The knot which could not be untied was cut. “The thunderbolt was wrested from the hands of the tyrant! . . .” Think of the thunderbolt of such a king as Louis XVI.!

But it will be said that the nation gained greatly by the change. It might be so; though I, as well as some others, did not think so. The stage, it is true, was relieved from the censorship of the courtly and ruffled M. Suard, but it was subject to a censorship of a different order. No piece could be hazarded until it had been purified and republicanized by the *litterati* of the commune. These gentlemen were less inclined to mutilation

than to interpolation. They scrupled not to invest "Mérope," "Athalie," and "Dido," with the insignia of republicanism ; and as to "Mahomet," they would, if they could, have adorned his turban with the tri-coloured cockade.

How often, in those days, did I bewail the cruel fate of an actor ! We were put nightly to the rack ; insulted by the sarcastic jokes of the *Beaux*, and tormented by the vociferations of the *Tape-durs* ! How pitiable was the condition of an actor of genius, compelled to submit to the caprice of such spectators ! They did not know what they wanted. The piece announced was not appropriate to the times—or the performer was deficient in patriotism. The company to which I belonged, having been long marked out as objects of popular disfavour, were the most persecuted. My hand trembled as I rubbed the rouge on my cheeks, at the thought of the vulgar attacks to which I was in the next moment to be subjected.

The *Beaux* were the precursors of the *Muscadins*, with this difference, that the latter were opposed to the *Tape-durs* ; while between these and the *Beaux* the most perfect harmony prevailed. These Adonises of the Revolution, however, were but short-lived ; their season lasted only six weeks. They fluttered away their ephemeral existence, and

disappeared, like flies that usher in the plague, and die its victims.

At the theatre, the *Beaux* acted the parts of fuglemen to the *Tape-durs*. They assumed the task of dramatic commentators, and would criticise certain passages as reprehensible, or find fault with an actor for dwelling too much on what they chose to consider words of suspicious import. Lynceus, we are told, could see the fish through the timbers of a ship ; but his keenness of vision was not to be compared with these worthies. Lynceus, after all, saw nothing but what really was in the sea, while these critics espied in our plays things which had actually no existence.

The *Tape-durs* amused themselves by making a noise in the theatre ; singing, or rather roaring, their patriotic songs, to the annoyance of all who were less boisterously inclined than themselves. They had not acquired their title of *Tape-dur* quite so early as the 10th August, but they had long laboured to deserve it. These janissaries of the Revolution wore a particular livery. It consisted of wide pantaloons and short waistcoats, with a strange kind of cap covered with fox-skin, and falling down over the broad shoulders of the wearer, who moreover carried about with him, as an auxiliary to this elegant costume, a large knotted

stick, which was styled in derision, a *constitution*.

Let it not be supposed that I am drawing a caricature; far from it: this is a subject on which I am not disposed to be humourous. In the awful times through which we passed, nothing appeared burlesque, not even the grimaces of the street-buffoons. The *Tape-durs*, with their tattered garments, mud-bespattered and often blood-stained, presented a certain wildness of aspect, which in my eyes was not unaccompanied by a certain degree of savage grandeur. They might have furnished Shakspeare with models for his Caliban. They seemed like colonies of strangers, suddenly transported to the French soil, and having learned nothing of the language except blasphemy, menace, and the *Carmagnole*. They went about in bands, frequently accompanied by females of their own party, who were, if possible, more savage than themselves. It was the business of these harpies to surround the scaffold at public executions, exciting the passions of the mob, and to strain their lungs at the theatres, in order to make as much uproar as possible. The old females of this class were called *Tricoteuses*, and the young ones were denominated *furies de guillotine*. As for me, when I first saw these *Tape-durs* performing their rude dance, and uttering their coarse

sneers before some unfortunate individual whom they had selected as an object of attack, I could have fancied I beheld Satan's condemned legions as depicted by Rubens, animated into hideous reality.

After the catastrophe of the 10th August, such were the audiences who occupied our pit; and the reader may guess whether the classic productions of the French drama were entertainments suited to their taste. But strange as it may seem, the terrific days of September emancipated us from the thrall of this horde of barbarians. Our theatre was closed for eighteen days, and when it reopened, we were both astonished and delighted to find the sort of audience we desired to perform to. This favourable change revived our drooping spirits, and the "*Matinée d'une jolie Femme*," by Vigée, served in some degree to refresh our literary atmosphere.

Yes; there was an obvious reaction. Possibly the struggle of the party of the *Gironde* began to give birth to new hopes,—perhaps a feeling of indignation gave an impulse to noble hearts,—or it might be that with these two causes there was mingled a third, namely, that the revolutionary explosion had knit families more closely together. These questions I do not pretend to decide; but a change seemed to have come about. In the recent great

and sudden movements disunion had prevailed, evil passions had been unloosed, and each individual looked with distrust on his neighbour. But when a great public calamity all at once befel the nation, well-disposed people began to feel the necessity of union. The horrible butcheries which had taken place aroused some honest and indignant hearts, who sought to meet with others like themselves. To this party, the proscriptions to which our company had been subjected were claims to patronage, and our theatre was used by them as a rendezvous.

There they could count their numbers and estimate their strength, which it had been the policy of the movement party to hinder their doing. Twenty representations, at twelve hundred persons each, all of them applauding, made an opposition party of just twenty-four thousand. Ah! if our frequenters had but been as bold in other places as they were in the theatre! But, alas! all the fervor they exhibited within our walls evaporated outside of them; and whenever they set foot in the streets, they seemed to envelope themselves in their habitual timidity as regularly as they wrapped themselves in their cloaks.

Yet there was found a young dramatic writer sufficiently spirited to make head against the

terrorists of the day, against an audacious party whose popularity was founded on corruption and false principles, and whose strength consisted even less in its own audacity, than in the weakness of honest men. Such was the insolent faction whom Laya confronted. He sought to address himself to the nation, and for want of another sufficiently elevated, the stage was selected as the tribune whence to fulminate the powerful invectives of the "Ami des Lois." The boldness of Laya was not the mere enthusiasm of youth, the ardent temperament which gathers strength from opposition ; it was a calm reflective energy, the result of deep and settled feeling. Inspired with patriotic ardour, and armed with the poignant shafts of sarcasm, even the Marats and the Robespierres were seen to writhe beneath his lash.

The production of this piece excited the uneasiness of the Jacobins. Even during the rehearsal we were warned that the Commune kept an eye upon us, and that several members of the Convention were vigilantly watching the author, the actors, and the work. Nevertheless, we persevered, and the "Ami des Lois" had greater success than any piece ever registered in our theatrical annals. The public assembled at an early hour every day before our doors ; the neighbouring streets were actually blockaded, and our

tickets were retailed at a premium. The enthusiasm of the audience was unparalleled; at each representation the author was loudly called for, and Laya, with a dignified calmness, equally remote from false modesty or pride, cheerfully responded to the call.

The general council of the Commune soon took alarm at the interest thus excited, and at the evident turn which public feeling was taking in favour of good principles, justice, and humanity. The consequence was, that the prohibition of the performance of the "*Ami des Loix*" was determined on. But our municipal worthies speedily recollected, that before they could stop the performance of a play, it was requisite to show that it had caused a breach of the peace. Accordingly they arranged their plans for the attainment of that desired result. They delayed sending us the official announcement of their decision, and waited until the public were assembled at the doors of the theatre. They then placarded their decree throughout all Paris.

The scheme was well contrived. The crowd was immense; the boxes, the lobbies, the pit, in short, every corner of the house, high and low, was filled as soon as the doors were opened; even the stage was thronged with spectators. Such a vast assemblage could not be disappointed with-

out showing signs of turbulence. A disturbance ensued, which was precisely what the municipal party wanted.

On our making the announcement from the stage, that we were obliged to change the piece, it was instantly received by a tremendous shout of indignation—"It is an act of tyranny!" and shouts of "*L'Ami des Lois! L'Ami des Lois!*" were repeated from all quarters, in a tone of fury which threatened to exact obedience.

A few persons attempted to address the audience in justification of the prohibition, but the pit rose in one mass and ejected them from the house, amidst the sneers and hootings of the multitude. The tumult was now at its height. In vain did the commandant of the National Guard make his appearance; not a word would they hear from him. Nothing could be distinguished but a constant succession of jokes and puns, with a running bass accompaniment of "*The Play! the Play!*" At length the drum was heard, and it was announced that the military were marching upon the theatre.

It was now growing late, and the disturbance continued to increase, when Chambon, the Mayor of Paris, presented himself to the audience. He delivered with calmness and dignity the few words he addressed to the spectators, but he was not

listened to. On the contrary, the people crowded round him, reiterating their demands with violent gesticulations, until he at length proposed retiring to the general council of the Commune, to deliberate on what steps should be taken.

“No, no!” was the reply, “not to that den! Go to the Convention!”

I am anxious to take this opportunity of rendering justice to the memory of M. Chambon, who was always faithful to his post in times of danger and difficulty. A *bon-mot* of Madame de Staël’s, at his expense, has often been repeated, but I think it far more witty than just. “M. Chambon,” said the lady, “is like a rainbow; he never makes his appearance till the storm is over.” On the occasion of which I am here speaking, the storm was actually raging, and that loudly too, when the Mayor came forward. In fact, he was so much injured by the pressure of the crowd, that he was attacked by a fit of illness, from which he never recovered.

Chambon wrote instantly to the Convention, which was then holding permanent sittings for the trial of the unfortunate Louis XVI. We, on our parts, adopted some measures of defence. Laya drew up a vigorous address, in which our wrongs as well as his own were fully detailed.

Chambon’s letter and Laya’s address produced

a great degree of excitement, especially as the Jacobins promulgated, through the medium of the press, a statement that the minister Roland had commissioned Laya to write the "*Ami des Lois*," and had paid him for it. This malicious imputation, wholly incredible to all who knew either Laya or Roland, was indignantly repelled; and on the motion of Kersaint, the Convention passed to the order of the day, on the ground that there was no law which authorised the Commune thus to violate the liberty of the theatres.

The result of the discussion was quickly conveyed to us, and proclaimed amidst general shouts of joy and unanimous applause. The piece was played, and played with all the spirit and effect which such a triumph was calculated to inspire. Never was the *Comédie Française* more brilliant.

But the Commune had not yet done with us. The struggle was resumed with greater fury than before. The Jacobins felt annoyed that during such a crisis as the trial of the King, a theatrical disturbance should have nearly thwarted their plans, by exciting an additional discord among the members of the Convention. We, however, maintained our rights with energy. As serving to show how small a thing was wanting to turn the tide of political events,—the circumstance is not a little remarkable, that we, a company of

actors and a dramatic author, should have had the provisional executive council on our side, and that a decree of the supreme Commune should have been a second time quashed in our favour.

During the interval of our discussions, two events of theatrical interest occurred. The first was the appearance of Picard in a higher range of dramatic writing than that in which he had previously appeared. He now produced a very clever piece under the title of "*Le Conteur ; ou, les deux Postes.*" Having been previously known only as the author of some light productions, brought out at the minor theatres, his rapid advance, as exhibited in his new piece, excited astonishment. This new play revealed his true powers. The gay and easy flow of the dialogue, together with a stamp of genuine originality, were qualities which at once decided its success. The *Comédie Française* did not, as has been asserted, hail him as a second Molière, but they assigned him a place by the side of our most esteemed comic writers, and that was at least something for a beginning.

The other event I have to notice was the *débüt* of Baptiste the elder, one of the best recruits made by Beaumarchais when he established his

Théâtre du Marais. This actor at once engaged the attention of the public; his figure, his deportment, his countenance, and appropriate action, distinguished him above all the other members of the company of the Marais. Some happy persons become men of the world the moment they enter upon the scene of life; Baptiste was an actor the instant he trod the stage. When I saw him, he reminded me of Bellecourt, and in many of his parts I think he even surpassed him. Perhaps he indulged somewhat too much in abstraction, but in his best moments nobody could excel him. No other actor could give equal effect to the *Tartuffe*, or the *Glorieux*. He caught the delicate points of the latter character with admirable nicety and discrimination. Pride, impertinence, spleen, insolence, embarrassment, and humiliation, were blended together with a degree of skill which few performers possessed. Unfortunately, not for the stage, but for himself, Baptiste was not young when he first appeared; but though he had not time to attain the renown of actors who are called the pillars of the stage, he might, at least, have been pronounced to be one of the very key-stones of its arches. .

Whilst our rival theatres were thus actively employed, we were far from being idle ourselves.

About the beginning of June, when terrorism was at its height, and arrests were frequent, a few days after the bold *coup d'état* which proscribed the *Gironde*, and when Danton, Robespierre, Marat, and Fouquier, were in power, we added to our list "*Les Fausses Confidences*." This piece belonged to the Théâtre Italien, but it met with a most successful reception on our boards. It is true that the acting of Contat added to its attractions. But Marivaux was a writer of talent, and, whatever may be said to the contrary, a masterly painter of the French character. His works are like a mirror hung up in a room in which there are nothing but Watteaus:—would you break the mirror for not reflecting the works of other schools? Marivaux certainly had not travelled on the high-road of human observation, but nobody knew better than he, the little bye-paths to the heart. Nor did any writer ever penetrate more closely into the secrets of female coquetry. In a country where coquetry is national, it is at least something to be the historian of the *boudoir*.

But our attempts to revert to the feelings and habits of the past, or, as it was termed, to the starched style and perfumed phrase, while all around was redolent of carnage, were looked upon with an eye of suspicion. The visitors to our

theatre were regarded amidst the new society by which we were surrounded, much in the same sort of light as that in which a fashionable assembly would be viewed in the middle of the Place Maubert.

In this state of things, what course did we pursue? In the teeth of these praters about equality, we showed up the manners of the court; to fanatical atheists, we preached universal tolerance;—to the ragged *tape-durs*, we dared to show the glory of washed faces and clean linen. The Comédie Française presented to its select audience “*Pamela; ou, la Vertu récompensée.*” On this occasion, M. Français de Neufchâteau was our accomplice, and his *Pamela* was destined to pay full interest for “*L’Ami des Lois.*”

For his result, however, we were not then prepared. It is one of the many remarkable traits exhibited in revolutions, that each individual, whether of the oppressed or dominant party, fancies that the most trifling act of his life has its influence on the course of events. When all is in extremes, the intermediate gradations are unperceived; the extraordinary character of real events naturally leads to improbabilities. In such a state of things, a single word lends its weight in the balance. To those who are always on the very verge of the impossible, a play is a

thing of no small importance ; and we fancied that even *Pamela*, so gentle, so tender, so full of sensibility, might change the aspect of France.

However, to guard against the risk of doing mischief to any body, or of furnishing any pretext for fresh accusations against the oldest and most persecuted of all the theatres, we played with great caution, avoiding as much as possible identifying ourselves with the author's sentiments. The art of sinking the author in the actor was one with which "*Pamela*," from its own intrinsic merits, could well dispense ; and while we exerted ourselves to do full justice to the piece, we abstained from availing ourselves of the opportunities it afforded of producing clap-traps.

Unfortunately for us, public events in themselves created those effects in spite of us. There was scarcely a sentence without its application, hardly a single line that did not convey a censure. With "*Pamela*," thus understood, the Théâtre Français became to the demagogues like the barrel of Regulus to that martyr in the cause of justice,—they struck themselves every moment against a point. If the cautious actor desired to modify some particular trait, the subdued tone of his voice was instantly construed into a covert allusion. Things which we never even dreamed of ourselves, the audience gave us credit for.

They identified themselves with us, and growing warm in their enthusiasm, it is scarcely matter of wonder that they at length inspired us with a portion of their own ardour.

Meanwhile our masters were not sleeping at their posts. We received a peremptory order to suspend the representations of "Pamela," on the pretence that the sentiments of the piece tended to restore (or at least to excite regret for) the abolition of the order of nobility. The author's friends, alarmed for his safety, advised him to withdraw the piece altogether; but M. de Neufchâteau refused to do this, and would only consent, at our solicitation, to omit some passages which seemed likely to afford a handle to the evil-disposed.

At length the piece was again announced for the 2nd September. We felt a sad presentiment of the misfortunes which awaited us, when we received directions to insert the following notice at the foot of the bill of the Comédie Française:—
"In conformity with the orders of the Municipality, the public is informed that no canes, sticks, swords, or other offensive weapons, are to be brought into the theatre."

Such a notice as this was more like a signal for, than a precaution against, disturbance, and there were not wanting mischievous spirits to accept

the invitation. They looked upon it as a hint particularly addressed to themselves, and interpreted it to signify, "There is to be a riot here to-night."

We were all assembled on the stage, hesitating to give the word to raise the curtain. We even feared to take a peep at the house, feeling a sort of dread that we should find a Revolutionary Committee assembled before us. At length St. Fal stepped forward and put his eye to the peeping-hole.

"Look," said he to me, "can it be they? If so, they are not quite so black after all, devils as they are." I looked, another looked, and then the whole of us peeped in succession, I believe. Never did I see a more brilliant or a better composed audience. There were even a considerable number of ladies, some of whom had ventured to sport a different head-dress from the shabby *cornette*, the symbol of equality. As for the men, though I certainly perceived some black, rough-looking crops among them, the great majority formed lines of powdered heads,—those respectable powdered heads which had for twenty long years patronised the Comédie Française, precious remnants of the old *parterre* of the Faubourg Saint-Germain.

There was but one individual in the whole of

this numerous assemblage whose presence annoyed me; he had taken up his position in the *balcon*, and seemed to be on the look-out for something. He was one of the turbulent spirits of the day, whom at a subsequent period I saw in a much improved condition, at Dresden, cutting a very good figure among the general officers of the imperial staff. At the theatre I saw only his back, but that was quite sufficient to excite my anxiety. I have always had the faculty of reading people's thoughts in their faces, but on this occasion my penetration went even beyond that, for I saw at once from the cut of this gentleman's shoulders, and the turn of his figure, that he was brewing mischief.

The curtain rose, and we commenced. Never did our company perform with greater spirit and talent,—never did Mademoiselle Lange personate *Pamela* with greater sensibility and grace. She evidently exerted her utmost efforts to please, and her enthusiasm excited mine, for my performance of my *Lord Bonfil* was honoured with unusual applause. Two or three allusions in the course of the piece occasionally disturbed the equanimity of my friend in the *balcon*, whom, in the excitement of the performance, I had almost forgotten. At last, in reply to something which *Andrews* says against persecution and intole-

rance, I could not resist the temptation of throwing the utmost possible effect into the observation of *Lord Bonfil* :

“All honest men are agreed on that point.”

“No! no!” exclaimed the broad-shouldered gentleman, rising from his seat; “this is too bad!” and he looked at me as if he could have added, “This is not to be endured, citizen Fleury.”

“Monsieur?” was the interpretation of the look I gave him in return; and as if this silent dialogue had been sufficiently well understood between us he continued :

“You are repeating passages of the play which have been cancelled and prohibited.”

I fixed my eyes upon him, and respectfully replied :

“I beg your pardon, monsieur, I am playing my part as it has been approved of by the Committee of Public Safety.” Then, bowing to the audience, who seemed quite astounded with the scene, “Are we to proceed, gentlemen?” said I, “or is it your pleasure that the play should stop.”

“Go on! go on!” was the general cry; “turn out the disturber.”

“You are favouring the moderates,” howled the personage in the *balcon*, with furious gesticulation; “the piece is counter-revolutionary.”

In an instant the whole audience rose with one accord, and joining in one indignant and irresistible shout of "Turn him out! turn him out!" drove the offender from the theatre. The play was then continued and brought to a conclusion in triumphant style.

We were all dressed for the second piece, when some friends arrived at the theatre to inform us, that the person who had been expelled from the theatre had gone straight to the Jacobin Club, and denounced the Théâtre Français as a den of aristocrats, where public opinion was perverted by the performance of counter-revolutionary pieces.

"Fly!" said some one to Dazincourt, who was marked out not less particularly than myself.

"What think you, Fleury? shall we be off?" said Dazincourt.

"By no means," rejoined I. "Fly wheresoever we may, we shall be pursued: let us stay where we are; this is our 10th of August."

No sooner had I uttered these words, than it was announced to us that the military had surrounded the theatre.

"Draw up the curtain," said I. In a few moments we were before the public, and the "Ecole des Bourgeois" commenced.

I performed the *Marquis de Moncade*, but my thoughts anxiously wandered from my part to

the danger that threatened me and my comrades. There were others too, in whose safety I was not less deeply interested. Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe and her lovely daughter Emilie, now Madame de Sartines, were seated in one of the stage boxes on the lower tier. During an interval of bye-play, and unobserved by the rest of the audience, I said to them in an under tone :

“The military are surrounding the theatre; make your escape.” They did escape ; but, alas ! only for a time. Shortly afterwards the fatal axe was suspended over their heads.

The piece being ended, the performers bade each other farewell, for we all expected to be arrested on leaving the theatre; but in this expectation we were disappointed. On my return home, I found my sister in tears : Madame Sainville was with her, and my daughter, then very young, was asleep¹. Madame Sainville informed me that some one who called in the course of the evening, had acquainted them with the unfortunate occurrences at the theatre. With the view of consoling my sister, I affected to treat the affair as less serious than I felt it to be ; and I expressed a hope

¹ Probably an illegitimate daughter of Fleury, as no mention is made of his marriage in the course of these volumes. His child by the celebrated actress Mademoiselle Clermonde died shortly after its birth. (See vol. i. p. 49.)

which I was far from entertaining, that extreme measures would not be resorted to. I went to the room in which my daughter slept, and approaching her bed as softly as I could to avoid disturbing her slumber, I imprinted on her cheek a farewell kiss. *Félicité* understood this, and threw herself into my arms in an agony of grief.

My dear sister united in herself all the most cherished recollections of my past life. I conducted her to my apartment, and there we proceeded to burn some papers which, though insignificant at another time, might have proved dangerous then. There was one thing about which I was a little apprehensive. I had written with my own hand the genealogy which traced the descent of *Charlotte Corday* from the great *Corneille*. Of this document, I had imprudently given away two copies ; and it might thus possibly endanger heads more valuable than mine. But as any endeavour on my part to recover possession of them would have given rise to suspicion, I deemed it advisable to remain quietly at home.

The Commune of Paris, acting on the representation of the Jacobin Club, issued an order for our arrest, which order was executed on the night of the 3rd of September. The *Comédie Française*, that realization of the grand idea of *Molière*, was now no more.

I was conducted to the prison of the Magdelonnettes, where I found assembled a good number of my comrades, who had already been placed under the safeguard of the liberal bolts and bars of the nation.

CHAPTER XXX.

Advantages of being imprisened.—Gaols of the Republic.—Paillex.—Crowded state of the Magdelonnettes.—A kind-hearted gaoler.—Arrangements for our accommodation in prison.—Friendship of our fellow-captives.—The poet Fontanes.—Remarkable instance of presence of mind.—A narrow escape.—Prison snuffers.—Ingenious contrivance of Laroche.—Anecdote.—Agamemnon wielding the broom.—Dupont.—Champville.—A remark of M. de Malesherbes.—Pascal.—Complimentary reply of Champville.

THEY who have experienced the mental torture of long and painful uncertainty, — that sensation of fear, — that dread of impending evil in which the ideal even aggravates the reality of the suffering,—they, I say, who have passed through such a state of torment, will readily comprehend how much I felt my mind relieved, when I was at last really and truly committed to one of the Bastilles of the Republic. It was indeed a positive advantage; for in a city convulsed by revolution,

a prison becomes an asylum. Besides, who could then boast of being free? Could the man engrossed in business,—or could he who pursued only pleasure? Alas, no! All were liable every moment to become the victims of suspicion and vengeance¹.

Happy, then, were prisoners; for, as I have said, they were relieved from uncertainty, as well as from the deceptions to which the revolutionary crisis compelled men to resort. Prison friends,—those at least whom, as was our case, a common danger threatens,—are true friends. The inside of a gaol is a great corrective of all sorts of egotism. In the midst of so much affliction, who can pretend to claim exclusive attention to his particular share? With regard to my comrades and myself, we all felt that to complain of one's

¹ However, notwithstanding this revolutionary commotion, and even during the period of its greatest effervescence, the Parisians repaired regularly and quietly to the Opera. The curtain rose in the evening precisely at the accustomed hour, whether sixty heads, or only six, had that day rolled on the scaffold. It is, too, particularly worthy of remark, that the most violent Septembrist would take his place, like any other, in the rear of the crowd, seeking admission, and, if blamed for too great pressure, would say to the man who complained, and whom, if accused before him at the Abbaye, he perhaps would have sent to the guillotine,—“Well, citizen, it is not my fault; I am pushed from behind.”—*Note by the French Editor.*

own fate would have been ridiculous, when each surrounding individual had a claim to consolation. Whilst, therefore, every one reflected apart upon his own case, there was a general exchange of encouraging hopes and cheering words. The energetic communicated a portion of their spirits to the feeble, so that courage became a sort of common stock, on which each individual could draw; and patience was a virtue, which all were desirous to emulate in the prisons of 1793.

Much has been published respecting the revolutionary gaols. For my own part, having inhabited the Magdelonnettes and Picpus, (our fair comrades were sent to Sainte-Pelagie and the Anglaises,) and having had friends in the Plessis and Port Royal, then called Port-Libre, perhaps because it was a prison, I could add much to what has already been written respecting these prisons. But as every one who was then in the heyday of youth may now tell the tale to his grandchildren, I shall touch only on matters peculiar to myself; not forgetting, however, any thing that concerns the Comédie Française.

The prison of the Magdelonnettes was an old building appropriated to the confinement of thieves and convicts under sentence; but arrests becoming daily more numerous, especially during the first days of September, 1793, the *preserves*

of the Committee of Public Safety became so encumbered, that every house of correction was converted into a house of detention, or parliamentary lock-up. A short while before our arrival, the Magdelonnettes was inhabited solely by its usual occupants, who, according to the vocabulary and custom of the place, claimed to be distinguished by the very imaginative title of *Pailleux*¹. These gentlemen had been lodged in the upper stories; but as some of them had taken advantage of the confusion and bustle occasioned by new laws, new regulations, and numerous arrivals, to effect their escape, they were all brought down to the ground-floor, where they could be more readily watched. They were succeeded in their lofty quarters by citizens, called “the suspected,” to which charge their too great honesty or too great simplicity had rendered them liable. They were members of different Parisian sections, but chiefly of the *Marchés*, the *Contrat Social*, and the *Montagne*.

¹ Doubtless not from *pailleux*, or *pailleux*, a dealer in straw or chaff, for that might be an honest employment; but the marks like filaments, which disfigure precious stones, are called *Pailles*, (literally, straws) and diamonds and other jewels, on which such defects appear, are said to be *pailleux*. It seems then that these worthies regarded themselves as brilliants of the first water, the lustre of whose character had unfortunately been dimmed by a few spots and flaws.—*Note by the Translator.*

According to the first plan, the Magdelonnettes had been arranged so as to afford accommodation to about two hundred prisoners, but by the time we arrived, the number had increased so much, that our addition made it about three hundred. It may easily be imagined how we were crowded. It was necessary to squeeze the prisoners into the smallest possible space. Moveable beds were placed in the passages, and much ingenuity was exercised in packing and stowing us away; still there were not enough, during the extraordinary overflow of arrivals, which lasted some days; and, strange to say, the embarrassments were for a time aggravated through the really good intentions of our gaoler. A word, therefore, on this worthy man.

Our *Concierger*, M. Vaubertrand, junior, formed an honourable exception to the Cerberi who had charge of the Parisian prisons. His wife, a most amiable woman, used to call us her boarders; and their child, a charming boy, told us we were his pigeons. They were a happy, kind-hearted family, and it was impossible not to love them. The husband detested his office, but was compelled to hold it. He studied, however, to reconcile the difficulties of his position with the duties of humanity. He felt for what we suffered, and he had also to suffer himself. He pitied us, on

account of the hardships we endured within the walls ; and he might well have been pitied himself, for the reproofs he received from without.

When the irruption of the defeated sections rendered it necessary to fix the berths of those who were to occupy the quarters of the *Pailleux*, the worthy Vaubertrand exerted himself to give the best possible accommodation to men accused of no specific crime, but described as "suspected." The apartments looked to the back area, and were mere cells of about six feet square each. A man under the middle size could, by raising his arm, easily touch the roof ; two windows with six small panes, such as would yield four sous a piece to the glazier, protected on the outside by thick gratings, scarcely allowed the air to penetrate. Each cell was destined to receive twelve inmates, and the only furniture consisted of twelve cribs stuck close together against the walls, and furnished with wretched mattresses. The first care of our benevolent concierge was to get rid of the cribs, and replace them by bedsteads. But the bedsteads required more room than the cribs, and the chambers which before served for twelve persons could now admit only eight. There was more convenience, but less space to move in ; and space ! space !—one week in prison will teach a

man to know the value of a foot square, more or less, in cloistered life.

Some preparation had been made to receive us ; and that we did not lie the first night on bare straw was owing to the kindness of a few veterans who inhabited the second and third stories. We did not arrive as unknown individuals. We were not plain M. Saint-Prix, M. Vanhove, M. Laro-chelle, or M. Champville, M. Dazincourt, or M. Fleury ; we were the members of a literary corporation, bringing with us, as it were, into exile all the bygone graces and accomplishments of France. We were considered to represent in miniature all that gives a charm to social life : we were besides respected as a company that had dared to show moral courage at a time when, except the trivial courage of dying, all courage had disappeared.

The Comédie Française in prison, produced a powerful and painful impression. In thus attacking the most pleasing and attractive of the arts, the rulers of France seemed to afford the world the most significant idea of their character. Thousands of sympathetic recollections accompanied us ; we awakened innumerable national feelings, of which our removal to the Magdelonnettes seemed the funeral procession. It was a fine sight.—I still see the long file of pri-

soners drawn up in a double row, and hear the loud *vivats*, the reiterated plaudits of the spectators all uncovered. Even now, I often fancy I see myself and my companions passing between rows of *grandeesh*,—men who had been ministers, generals, and magistrates,—and between *Sans-culottes* too, who also saluted us with their acclamations. We found here some of the wealthy protectors of the arts; men who had been suspected of being counter-revolutionists, because they happened to have 200,000 livres of income. Here were also abbés and venerable priests. The last relics of the old society of France seemed gathered together to receive their last representatives. Tragedy and Comedy then passed triumphantly between two files of the persecuted. We also were an opposition under the axe, and ready under the axe again to make our cry of indignation resound.—I do not rightly know what Prometheus was so kind as to steal from heaven for our use, but I cannot help suspecting that it must have been pride,—for pride is too good a thing to be of human invention.

After our provisional instalment, several of the gentlemen who had attended the spectacle of our admission paid us visits. We immediately discovered that we were among friends. But had it not been so, a kind welcome would not have been

wanting; for every new capture was received in a generous and even affectionate manner. They were taught by the experienced to guard against deceptions, they were made acquainted with the characters of the different turnkeys, and assisted in overcoming the difficulties they had at first to encounter. We passed the night as well as we could, and the next day were called upon to relate our adventures. This is a tax rigidly exacted in return for prison hospitality; but the demand is easily satisfied, for in general people are very willing to relate the history of the persecutions they have endured, or to place their own case in the most favourable light. Accordingly, many interesting accounts of romantic escapes and contrivances to avoid arrest were daily given by new comers.

Among the instances of coolness and dexterity which were related, I recollect one which deserves to be preserved. The name of Fontanes, and the presence of mind which he displayed in a very perilous situation, will sufficiently recommend the anecdote to notice.

During the siege of Lyons, this poet had been shut up with his family in the midst of the city in ruins. His house was destroyed, and he never could discover the spot in which he had for se-

curity deposited a considerable sum in gold and silver and assignats. Full of alarm for the fate of his young wife, and of her recently-born child, he resolved at all risks to escape if he could. Having overcome the first obstacle, and obtained a passport, a second difficulty arose, which perhaps all the resources of an inventive imagination might not have been able to meet. The question was, how to carry away some valuable property, consisting of plate and other articles, which were then considered quite anti-republican. Among them was a chalice, a present long since made to his family by a sovereign, and on which an able artist had engraved the arms of the King of Sardinia. Fontanes greatly dreaded lest this should be discovered. A chalice! A vessel used in the service of the church!—bearing the arms of a King! Here was a threefold proof of aristocracy. However, go he must, or be exposed to certain death. But how was he to go and leave his only valuable property behind? Who could tell whither he might be obliged to fly? Who could foresee the duration of his exile? A wife! a child! and the prospect of the future uncertain! Fontanes decided,—he hastened to the house of a friend, a revolutionist, a worthy man, who had formerly been a nursery gardener, and who had retired to live at

his case ; but who had, in fact, been nearly ruined, since orchards were then laid waste as well as lordly mansions, the republican soil being expected to rear no trees but those of liberty. The poet laid aside all his feudal ornaments. Fontanes set about purchasing or exchanging his clothes to give himself another appearance ; he had his black hair cropped, and every bit of powder carefully removed, for powder was liberticidal ! He got wide pantaloons, shoes stuck full of large nails, without buckles, for buckles had all been presented to the nation in patriotic gifts ; he wished his friend the nursery gardener to manage the business, and the task was readily undertaken. Fontanes was now completely fitted from head to foot, in a style which enabled him to fraternize with any Sans-culotte living.

A few hours after, a young man, like a laundresse's porter, was seen coming out of the nursery-gardener's house, with a heavy basket of clothes on his shoulder. This was Fontanes. He had the plate and the fatal chalice in the basket, carefully packed under the linen. The pretended country lad walked heavily along grumbling under his burden. The young family followed at the distance of a few paces with the passport. But they had to pass close to the terrible instrument of

death ; for there it stood always ready for use. Fontanes shuddered. His wife turned pale. To them their situation was awful ! To turn into another street would have excited suspicion ; yet in approaching it they also felt that they might be running into danger. But reason and necessity urged them on. Fontanes resolved to act a decided part. He walked up in front of the guillotine, grasping the basket firmly with his hand, and loosening the leather strap as if to ease himself. He looked steadily at the scaffold.

A man of ruffianly appearance, one of those fellows who never quitted the spot, and attended as if they were guards of the guillotine, came up to him.

“ Are you afraid,” said he to Fontanes, “ that you look in this way at the national razor ? ”

“ Afraid,” said Fontanes, “ do you take me for a Federalist, that I should be frightened at the sight of the guillotine ? *Sacre bleu !* Look at me, do you see any thing like an aristocrat in my face ? ”

Meanwhile Madame Fontanes arrived with a beating heart, but inclining her head towards her child, and doubtless gathering resolution from the sight.

“ What are you ? ” said a second interrogator, addressing Fontanes.

“ I am a bleacher and scourer.”

“And this good woman?”

“What a question,” said Fontanes. “Look at the little one. Don’t you see the likeness,—myself in miniature? The young republican was born within ten months of our marriage. Was not that doing the thing patriotically?—*Vive la république!*”

“Ah! that’s right,” said the miscreant; “you’re a good one. Down with muscadins and aristocrats. *Vive la république!* and *Vive la guillotine!*”

Fontanes could not join in this sanguinary cry. He saw his wife tremble; her arm seemed no longer capable of supporting the infant; she staggered, and was on the point of betraying herself. He took her hand:—

“Come, wife,” said he, “do not you hear what our friends say? Let us have the song—

‘Ah! ça ira, ça ira, ça ira!

Les muscadins à la lanterne!

Bis! Bis! let us have it over again. It is a song to be repeated.”

“Aye, and to be danced too,” said the barbarian who had first spoken; “so let us have the dance: your hand. Down with your basket, my jovial fellow.”

“But, II”

“Nonsense—nobody will run away with your

basket ; down with it, I say !—Why, what's the matter ? is it glued to your neck ?”

Fontanes objected and resisted for a while, but was soon obliged to submit ; and wiping the cold perspiration from his forehead, in a state more dead than alive, was relieved from the burthen of his basket. He saw it placed on a heap of stones. Now, thought he, every thing will be turned topsy turvy. Oh ! the chalice ! the fatal chalice ! All hope of safety was gone ; he was on the point of delivering himself up, and claiming compassion for his wife and child, in the hope that they would be allowed to pass ; when happily his presence of mind did not entirely forsake him. He suddenly roused himself, clapped his hands, and assumed a joyful aspect.

“ Holloa ! my friend,” cried one of the fellows, “you're wonderfully merry all at once.”

“ A thought has struck me !” said Fontanes. “ a bold idea ! You see my poor wife ? I know the Carmagnole always raises her spirits. Come, my good fellows, let us dance it.”

His wife gazed at him with a look of despair, as he snatched the child from her arms.

“ What now ! don't make a wry face, wife,” said he. “ Excuse her, she's young and timid. Come, let us put the little one on the basket. I must put him down softly—there he lies,

on the top of the linen, and sleeps as soundly as if it were a bed of down. Wife, your hand. Now, the ring—the republican ring. Come, friends, join hands for the ring—the patriotic dance.”

Madame Fontanes now comprehended what her husband meant. She tripped lightly round the ring, and joined in the chorus of the Carmagnole. When the dance was over, she took up her child; the Sans-culottes assisted Fontanes in replacing his basket on his shoulder. He made his wife lead the way, and walked off after her whistling the *Chant du depart*. And so they escaped.

We were soon initiated in the habits of prison life. It will be easily conceived, that at a time when there were no such beings as *servants*, and when all domestics, male and female, had become *confidential friends*, it was necessary to learn to serve one's-self any where, and more particularly in prison. Each man laboured like a Robinson Crusoe to fit up an apartment for himself. I was not one of the most dexterous at this sort of work; for I never attempted to saw a board, without carrying away a piece of my shoe-leather, and sometimes damaging the foot itself. We criticised very freely each other's workmanship, and every one boasted of his own. I never before so dis-

tinely felt the pride of property. I was the owner of a little turn-up bed and two shelves. I succeeded in making a sort of desk with some pieces of wood and the board of a folio book. I had, moreover, one half of a pair of snuffers. I do not mean to say that the snuffers had been divided—by no means, they were good sound prison snuffers; but the pair had two proprietors; they belonged to Larochelle and me. Yet a property in common which can only be used by turns, is very embarrassing. It sometimes happened that the possession of these snuffers was a question of discussion between us. We were both fond of reading in bed, and as our wretched beds were at some distance from each other, we were often obliged to get out to get the snuffers. For a considerable time Larochelle took the trouble on himself, but at last my turn came. How impatient and out of humour did I not become! Why could I not have a pair to myself? But as good is sometimes derived from evil, so, in consequence of this destitution, I made an effort of courage I never could have thought of before; I ventured to snuff the candle with my fingers. It is true it required a great social concession to bring me to this; I doubt whether any thing less than the French revolution could have done it; however, at length I boldly grasped the flaming wick without flinch-

ing. At last Larochelle hit upon a contrivance which put us both at our ease.

Our beds were not very far asunder, but the main obstacle to reaching the snuffers from the one to the other was a projection of the wall between the beds. From a nail in the most advanced part of this projection, Larochelle hung the snuffers by a cord. To the end of the cord next the snuffers two strings were attached, one extending to his bed the other to mine. When either party wanted to snuff his candle, he pulled his string and obtained possession of the snuffers. When used, care was taken that the snuff should be extinguished before they were allowed to swing back to their position. The two side-strings were of course long enough to admit of this operation, without either of them being entirely drawn from the bed to which it respectively belonged.

This invention, which amused our fellow-prisoners, was speedily adopted in the other rooms, and Larochelle was generally applauded for his ingenuity. One of the first imitators was M. de Boulainvilliers, who repaid us for the instruction he received, by a little anecdote which the contrivance had brought to his recollection. I am pretty certain that he was himself the hero of the tale, though he gave it to another. To those who may have found my description of our candle-snuffing

somewhat puerile, the relation of the following anecdote may be some compensation.

A wealthy nobleman had a mistress, to whom he was most tenderly attached. By a thousand superior qualities she had quite won his heart; no fault could be found with her but one—a fault less rare in the sex than is commonly believed; at least, if we may rely on Boccacio, a connoisseur in such matters. She was of a grasping and avaricious disposition, but her selfish feelings were always disguised with infinite skill. She managed so as to make her wants be guessed through the reserve with which she covered them, and thus what she desired she always obtained, without ever seeming to seek it. Easy and graceful, all her movements were pleasing; and the slight veil of art in which she wrapped herself, only rendered her more engaging. This lady one day received as a present a pair of silver candlesticks so richly ornamented, that the workmanship far surpassed the cost of the material. Her lover, who never thought an act of generosity sufficient unless he could accompany it with that delicacy which enhances a gift, caused the present to be sent to the lady's address by the silversmith, under positive injunctions that the name of the donor should not be disclosed. On visiting her in the evening, he expatiated on

the beauty of the candlesticks ; and affecting to conjecture from what quarter they had come, he observed that so rich a present must have been made by some great banker or farmer-general.

“ Oh ! by no means,” replied the lady with one of her looks full of meaning ; “ a person of that sort would not have been so ungallant as to send me a pair of candlesticks without snuffers.”

But to return to our prison occupations. Our joinery-work and cabinet-making, and other labours of that kind, were all pleasant enough ; they had relation to ornament. These were, indeed, works necessary on our first establishment, and they lasted only two or three days. Others, less easily executed, and to which we felt most repugnant, had to be done daily ; and more particularly disagreeable were the morning cleansings. Each prisoner had to sweep and scrub his own apartment ; he was not allowed to omit the slightest detail, and when every thing was done for himself, he had still to co-operate in the works for the general service of the establishment. It was quite amusing to see how awkwardly Saint-Prix handled his broom, holding it somewhat in the manner that soldiers cross bayonets, and the dignity with which he proceeded to clear out what appeared to him an Augean stable. As for Dupont, full of

zeal, and always kind, he was everything to everybody. His conduct was the more remarkable in a young man, who with a long career before him, must have felt more severely than his seniors the mortification of disappointed hopes. He had been greatly indulged, and was the spoiled child of the theatrical family; but delicately as he had been reared, he became a Spartan in the prison.

Champville too, it would be a sin to forget him. This worthy nephew of Préville played the broadly marked comic parts in the theatre, and I may also say that he played the same on the great stage of the world. Broad humour was natural to him. In person he was rather plump, with some of that rotundity which is generally supposed to indicate a free partaker of the luxuries of the table. His obesity perhaps influenced the destination of his talent, and made him who would have been the gentleman of high comedy, become the grotesque hero of farce. Such as he was, however, well did the public know how to appreciate him, and most especially in *Monsieur Pourceaugnac*. No human being ever played the part like him. Molière himself could not have surpassed him.

Champville, whose services were so very valuable at the theatre, was indispensable to us in the prison. Had he not been on this occasion

our companion, every individual would have felt a loss. A like sentiment was very naïvely expressed by a celebrated man, who was for a short while in our prison before he was transferred to Port Royal—I mean M. de Malesherbes.

“Well, M. Champville,” said the venerable and illustrious juriconsult, one day, “I assure you I should have much to regret had I lost the pleasure of your acquaintance.”

“And I too,” replied Champville; “I shall, all my life, congratulate myself on the honour which has befallen me; only I would have wished that it had happened in a more agreeable place.”

“Ah, *mon Dieu!* Let us congratulate ourselves without any reservation,” replied M. de Malesherbes, with that air of intelligence and at the same time of genuine simplicity, so much admired by Madame Geoffrin, “let us congratulate ourselves without any reservation, for perhaps our different occupations in the world would not otherwise have permitted us to meet.”

The young and active were always ready to relieve the aged and infirm from the annoyance of the prison occupations. In some instances an individual would devote himself to the assistance of another, and become his regular helpmate. Champville’s attentions to M. Boulainvilliers were most praiseworthy; he so managed that he

was always at hand when that gentleman had any thing to do, and he tricked him out of his turn of labour. The old Count was duped in the most amusing manner possible when Champville, playing the clumsy country clown, would come in his way and interrupt his work. Champville loved to do things in this careless dashing manner. To some who gave themselves airs of dignity when dignity was quite out of place, he would say—

“Have you read Pascal, Pascal’s ‘Provinciales’—the great Pascal?—I have read him, and I remember this remark:—‘He who would make himself an angel makes himself a fool.’”

Along with such pleasantries as these, he sometimes gave utterance to thoughts very happily and delicately expressed, which proved that he possessed good taste as well as good nature. I may instance his reply to M. Augrand d’Alleray, formerly lieutenant of police. He was the patriarch of the jail, and his firm demeanour, perfectly free from any thing like ostentation, inspired the other prisoners with confidence, though he was far from allowing himself to be deluded by hopes. It was reported that Fouquier-Tinville had drawn up a report on our cases, and indictments were said to be forthcoming with numerous counts, the slightest of which was a sufficient passport to the guillotine. On hearing this news, doubtless some thought

how they might best comport themselves so as to give an air of decorum to their fall; but as for the rest, they in general showed that they felt as men might be expected to do, over whom such fate was impending. Champville appeared perfectly easy and natural; he sang his every-day chants, performed his double prison duty, and sacrificed to the table with his usual gaiety and appetite.

“It is not indifference,” said M. Augrand d’Al-lery, “in this amiable young man, who loves to oblige every one. But how happens it that he is so calm when all around appear to experience some emotion? Such placidity would be natural enough in me or in others who are weary of life, and who have little reason to expect many happy days.”

“Why!” replied Champville, bowing to the old gentleman in a graceful manner, which was perfectly natural, “I have got my courage by contagion.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

Disease in the prison.—Sanatory measures adopted by Dr. Dupontet.—Military exercise.—A singular picture.—Ludicrous accident.—M. de Crosne, lieutenant-general of police.—His excellent conduct on the trial of Calas.—He is summoned to execution.—His resignation and coolness.—Performance of *Athalie* at the Théâtre Français.—Popular prejudice against Marie-Antoinette.—The Archbishop of Brienne.—Increased rigour of our confinement.—My daughter Josephine and young Vaubertrand.—Juvenile lovers.—Our friends prohibited from visiting the prison.—Judicial hypocrisy.—Inoculating the prisons.—Subscriptions for the poor prisoners.—My straitened pecuniary means.—Generous feeling among the prisoners.—The musical Abbé.—Metaphysical discussions.—The prisoner's dog.—The theory of Descartes refuted.

FROM what I have related, the reader may be inclined to suppose that, excepting permission to go out, we enjoyed all the pleasant intercourse of domestic life in a large mansion; and that when we assembled in the evening to chat together at our fire-sides, our position could not be other than

very agreeable. It is certain that probity, honour, knowledge, and talent, were located with us. In interesting conversation, delicate humour, and ingenious thoughts happily expressed, we largely participated ; nor were gaieties of a more boisterous kind entirely discarded. We led an active life ; the necessity of serving ourselves taught us to reflect as philosophers, and the pleasure of serving others fostered in us kindly feelings. It would seem that we were lucky in our place of confinement, for disease carried off many in the other prisons. Another death, however—a death more hideous, and accompanied with greater mental suffering and personal degradation, now seemed prepared for us. That none of our party were immediately summoned before the Revolutionary Tribunal was probably owing to Fouquier-Tinville's dread of the small-pox, which at that time prevailed in the Magdelonnettes.

The situation of our prison was more unhealthy than that of any other in Paris. It was, moreover, the fullest, and very badly ventilated. It had, indeed, a large yard ; but we were not allowed to go into it. In vain did we offer to defray the expense of such additional keepers as the due inspection of our promenade might require.

“ Patience !” said the commissary Marino ;

“ have patience! and you will be transferred. Your stay here is merely provisional; you will soon be sent to one of the roomy, well-aired prisons. Be patient! You are here only, as it were, in an antechamber.”

At length, by dint of reiterated complaints, our physician, the worthy M. Dupontet, was permitted to order every thing to be done that he thought necessary for preserving the health of the prisoners.

Nothing could overcome the disadvantages of our position; but Dupontet's skill was great, and it was exerted under the dictates of a truly benevolent heart. He ordered all the doors and windows to be thrown open at a fixed hour every day, after which a general fumigation took place. He made us take vigorous exercise before dinner, and in the evening. He at first regulated the method of this exercise himself, and we soon converted it into a sort of military promenade. We chose for our principal officers those who had sonorous voices, and who were also strategists. General Lanoue, and our comrade Saint-Prix, were elected unanimously, and under their command we marched, countermarched, and performed evolutions which might have done credit to a more regular and better disciplined corps. Our evening exercise presented a singular and

original spectacle. As the marching gallery was faintly lighted, some of the troop carried tapers; and then what a picture was seen!—corridors dark and dismal, men lank and pale, vacillating shadows, flickering lights, now blazing, now glimmering on figured robes de chambre, on quilted white dressing-gowns, on night-caps, and on gruff countenances that would not have smiled for an empire. The effect was the more comical owing to the light being carried in the hand, and thus thrown upwards, seemed to bedaub with bistre all the salient points of the visage, and bring the defects out in relief. This confusion of *chiaroscuro* afforded fine effects, of which an able painter might have availed himself. The wife of the Concierge, who came sometimes to see our procession, used to say that we formed subjects worthy of the pencil of Rembrandt. I thought that she flattered us a little, and the often-repeated laugh of little Vaubertrand convinced me that we bore more resemblance to Callot's *grotesques*, especially when M. d'Allery, by an awkward manner of holding his taper, burnt the chin or set fire to the ruffle of M. de Crosne, formerly lieutenant-general of police.

I must beg the reader's permission to pause a moment on this lieutenant-general of police, who has been judged so variously, but always partially.

I have been intimate with him at times when the heart, the head, and the whole character are laid open. I was honoured with his friendship, and to remember him in these pages is a debt of duty which I now discharge.

As with many other men, so was it with M. Thiroux de Crosne: in judging them, it is proper to consider them not so much as respects themselves personally, as with regard to the events in which they are involved. To know when to advance on the stage of public life, and when to withdraw, is a part of political science which a man who wishes to leave a reputation behind him ought to possess. M. de Crosne had the disadvantage of succeeding M. Lenoir, and of holding the situation till 1789. With him the administration of lieutenants-general terminated, and an unfavourable prejudice always attaches to the man who performs the last offices to an institution which once had celebrity.

I do not regret the want of that knowledge of facts which would enable me to give an opinion on the administrative talents of this magistrate. There are scales of rigid justice which one cannot easily learn to hold, except at the expense of some of the most agreeable feelings that belong to human nature. This much, however, I may venture to say, that De Crosne was a man of clear

perception and prompt decision. He upon whom his eye was fixed, felt that he was measured. Perhaps he made too great a parade of this faculty ; perhaps he had about him some of the feeling displayed by impertinent masqueraders, who having detected you under your disguise, wish to make known their discovery to all the company, and never cease proclaiming your name before your face. His fault then was the abuse of a good quality. But be this as it may, he who contributed so powerfully to the vindication and acquittal of Calas ; he who knew how to maintain the impartiality of the judge while the most violent passions raged around him ; to take a correct and lucid view of all the details of a most complicated process ; to reduce to order by enlightened investigation the chaotic elements of a cause, which interested the whole of Europe, was doubtless a man of no ordinary mould. No man is without some original defect, either on the right or the left. The fault of M. de Crosne was too much of direct interference. He was not gifted with the easy indifference of his predecessor. When M. Lenoir was in office, all the world thought that anybody might have done the business of lieutenant of police, but under M. de Crosne the duty seemed a burthen which none but an Atlas could bear. There was certainly

nothing of charlatanry about M. de Crosne, but though he was no quack, he perhaps made a somewhat too ostentatious display of his powers. He never would descend from his dignity. He reminded me of the old quarter-master, who having got a military order, never after appeared without it; took it to bed with him, and when he bathed had it still on his breast, secured in a water-proof case. But M. de Crosne possessed great energy and decision. Courage and activity were in him always conspicuous qualities.

I shall never forget our parting scene, for to us was his last farewell addressed. He was playing at Trictrac in my apartment, with M. de la Tour-du-Pin, when the name of de Crosne was called, and resounded through the corridor. We shuddered with horror, for we knew what such a summons indicated. "Well," said he, calmly rising, "I am ready." Then taking M. de la Tour by the hand, he bade him adieu. He next saluted us all with placid dignity, and said, "Gentlemen, farewell; I thank you for your kind attentions. You have soothed the last moments of my existence." He then walked out to the guillotine with as much grace and composure as if he had been going to court to have an audience of the king.

I obtained from M. de Crosne a curious official report of the manner in which the tragedy of

“*Athalie*” was received at the Théâtre Français, at the time when signs of the Queen’s unpopularity began to exhibit itself. The performance had been carefully watched, by authority, and every passage which called forth an expression of feeling on the part of the audience carefully noted. The report is a curious record of the existing prejudice against Marie-Antoinette, and the Archbishop of Brienne, who was then minister.

As if doomed to be the victims of every affliction in its turn, we were no sooner relieved from the sickness which affected us, than the Revolutionary Tribunal commenced its proceedings; pestilence, as the lesser calamity, yielded the precedence. This was natural; it was quite in the order of the hierarchy of evil. Our new suffering commenced by complete seclusion. An order of the Commune prohibited all correspondence with our friends. At first we were allowed to receive the visits of our relations; and my sister frequently came to see me, accompanied by my beloved daughter, Josephine. This charming, engaging child, full of sprightly archness, had made a conquest of young Vaubertand. She had employed some coquetry, for she was not slow to perceive that the youth was a power worth subduing. Accordingly, her toilet was varied on every visit, and to attack him in all his entrenchments, she made a great expenditure

of attraction. She brought bonbons, and comfits of all sorts, not forgetting gingerbread guardsmen wearing the red cap of liberty. In short, she soon awakened the boy's sympathy, and he awaited the visits of citizeness Josephine with an impatience of another kind than mine, but not of a less lively character. These two young creatures displayed in their mutual love all the simplicity of childhood. They were the delight of every one in the prison. For my own part, I could not but feel proud when I saw a circle of admirers draw round the pretty little pair, and found them the objects of general interest and affection. Happy days were those in which Josephine thus visited us. The young lovers had been told that I would oppose their union, and little Vaubertand, notwithstanding the polite deference we paid to his father, had a strong impression of the humility of his position, and could not venture to make a formal application to me. Sometimes I frowned on seeing them together, a frown that brought me a thousand caresses, with which I was much gratified. Josephine, who understood every turn of expression in my countenance, was always on the alert to banish any emotion which she thought adverse to her projects. When she advanced with her half smile, which seemed to intreat, or her half pouting lips, which threatened

to complain, I used to turn away my head, and avoid the attempts of her pretty hands to eling round my neck.

M. de Fleurieu, formerly minister of marine, who was one of our fellow captives, had told them that people could be married privately. On hearing this, they applied to their friend Dazinecourt, who promised to speak to the curé of St. Roch, and get every thing arranged for them. At length a day was fixed for the ceremony, and Josephine arrived as if on a visit, quite smartly dressed. She was rather abashed, because she had not told my sister; indeed she intended to deceive her, and disappeared while I was conversing with Felicité. I had a notion of what she was about, and prepared to act the angry father. I got sight of the pair, but they were already on their way to the curé of St. Roch, who performed the duties of chaplain in the prison. I had reckoned on producing a theatrical effect; far from it:—the youth, proud of his character, was not now to be checked. When I called out, “Stop, you audacious — !” he looked back, and, in a style of bravado, said, “O! no; that’s impossible; *we are going to be married privately!*”

Those who have had their hearts moved by the anecdotes of Pelisson’s spider will readily understand what a void the absence of my Josephine

seemed to create. Several of our society wept. For my part, I was in despair; I then felt myself truly a prisoner. Soon after this, we were denied the liberty of corresponding even with our relations. The letters I despatched and those addressed to me were all intercepted. If we wrote for any thing, except our linen, or some article of that sort, we never received it; and no answer on the subject was allowed to reach the interior of the prison, until every line in it that might really have interested us had been obliterated.

The duration of this period of suspended correspondence seemed to us extremely long. It was the interval devoted to the fabrication of prison conspiracies,—the period of judicial (the most odious of all) hypocrisies. While the hypocrites were bent on butchery, they wished to wash their hands of the blood they shed. It was cruelty sacrificing to fear. The atrocity of the 2nd of September, that horrible outrage on humanity, was at least distinguished by boldness; but the present men wanted the courage to dare. They sought for a pretext; they wished to irritate and produce agitation in the dungeons. A powerless revolt was to be the signal for carnage. Pretended prisoners, men of straw, were sent from the Luxembourg into all the gaols. These fellows were hired to excite and rouse us to vengeance.

A name was given to this wicked scheme quite worthy of its inventors. It was called, in the mysterious jargon of the cannibals, *inoculating the prisons*;—inoculating not to preserve but to destroy! Truly our tyrants were rich in antitheses!

Meanwhile we prisoners became more than ever united under this system. Men who had acted the highest parts in public life, here shook hands and formed friendships with the humblest. The *inoculators* could find no opportunity to exercise their skill on *us*. We taxed ourselves voluntarily, each in the proportion of his means, to provide for the wants of the less fortunate. I say *we*, for I also was one of the subscribers, though certainly not to the extent I could have wished. Two years before, I lost all my savings, which I had invested in the royal household;—the torrent which overwhelmed the monarchy also carried away my little peculium. I do not complain; the loss of one seems destined always to be the profit of another, and the revolutionary flood has had its alluvial deposits like other deluges. But at the period of which I am now speaking I was less resigned than I am at present, and was not a little vexed at making my donations in twelve sous pieces, when I would, under other circumstances, have made them in crowns. M. de Crosne's talents for administration

had been called into practice, and he had established an excellent system of accountability and management. The prison was divided into three sections :—the first, consisting of the subscribers ; the second, of those who could not subscribe, but who maintained themselves without receiving assistance ; the third, of those who were supported by the subscriptions.

Soon after this arrangement had been completed, an incident occurred in which Vanhove had a very honourable share, and which may be here recorded.

Among the prisoners under the heaviest charges, that is to say, prisoners committed for crimes which the tribunal could not be expected easily to pardon, as they affected the treasury, was M. Bovin, who was then a shopkeeper, and I believe still is, at Port Saint Bernard. In his commitment he was charged with allowing illegal sales of national securities to be transacted in his shop. He had already undergone a preliminary examination, and his next appearance before the Tribunal was to be for his final trial. He was one of those plain, well-disposed, goodnatured citizens, examples of whom are daily becoming fewer,—a genuine Parisian tradesman, precisely to be characterised in the words of the epitaphs of his day :—“ A loving husband, a good father, a sincere friend ; leaving

an inconsolable widow," &c. &c., and yet used to tell no falsehood. One day he was sent for, and he left us. We were all anxiety for his fate, and after some time had elapsed we began to despair. At length his voice was heard in the corridor. Several of his fellow-prisoners ran to meet him, and learned that he had been acquitted.

"Well, then, why are you still here?"

"I am acquitted," said he, "but under security. I am required to deposit 1000 crowns. I have them not, but I offered my bond for a larger sum, if they would allow me time. They refused; I must find the sum demanded, or remain in prison.—God knows how long that may be!"

"I know how long it will be," exclaimed M. Lagette, the merchant, who was in the assembled group; "just ten minutes!"

"How?" exclaimed Bovin.

"I will tell you how," said Lagette, at the same moment opening his pocket-book, and taking out 1000 crowns.

Bovin stood with tears in his eyes, but declined the noble offer.

"What! must I get the police to make you take them," said Lagette, "and send for a guard to turn you out? Come, come, say nothing about any condition or security, you and I will settle all that some other time."

While this scene of generosity was passing, the report went round the prison that Bovin was detained until he should find 3000 livres of security for the Revolutionary Tribunal. I was playing piquet with Vanhove, and we were disputing about our game. He heard the rumour, and ran to his desk, saying, "How happy I am I can pay this money, for I have 4500 francs, and 1500 will be quite enough for me for all the time I can expect to be in prison."

Vanhove ran to execute his generous purpose, and found that he had been anticipated by Lagette.

This is only one out of numerous instances of the rivalry in doing good which prevailed. Every one who possessed the means was eager to serve a fellow-prisoner in distress.

One of the companions of our imprisonment was an Abbé, who contributed in various ways to our social amusements. He was fond of music, and played the violoncello; but by a singular fatality he was always at fault when he had to play the note B flat. The E flat, the A flat, and every other flat, were all obedient to his bow, but the flat of B he never could get over. When the Abbé was invited to a private party, or amateur concert, some of his friends were usually malicious enough to get him called upon to take part in a

piece in the key of B flat. Nevertheless, the Abbé was no way disconcerted. There are various ways of getting on in the world, and he singularly enough was benefited by his defect. He became quite a favourite with the ladies, who were highly pleased with his playing, though they lamented his unfortunate impediment when he had to do with B flat; but this defect by no means operated to his disadvantage; it procured him the distinction of a nickname, and to hear the Abbé *Si Bemol* became quite the rage. The Abbé was young, gay, and handsome. Whether an old and less engaging Abbé, who could not have managed his B flat, would have been looked upon with equal indulgence by the ladies, may be questioned.

The Abbé, however, possessed many good qualities, besides his love of music. The following circumstance, which occurred about the time that our removal was contemplated, deserves to be related. We had amongst us some old disciples of Jansenism, but the Abbé's doctrines were of a much more youthful character. Polemical and metaphysical disputes sometimes arose among them, in which we actors did not consider it right to take any part. However, one day our attention was strongly awakened by a warm discussion. It appeared that, after investigating the questions of grace sufficient and grace effica-

cious, free-will and necessity, our theologians passed by the association of ideas to the question of the souls of brutes. The theory of Descartes found zealous supporters. Surely Descartes never experienced the fond affectionate caresses of a dog. I, who never found fault with the words of the worthy gentleman, who in a case of great danger called out, "Save my dogs and Colonel Churchill," was quite indignant at the system of the great philosopher. I could not bear the idea of my favourite animals being reduced to mere machines. What would La Fontaine have said to such a doctrine,—La Fontaine, who drew all his inspirations from Madame de la Sabliere's cat and cur!

The question was argued with great vivacity. The dialogue was brilliant. On both sides many smart and subtil things were said. However, the partisans of Descartes were the most loquacious, and insisted upon it that they had proved to demonstration that the several kinds of beasts were only different sorts of watches, with movements more or less complicated. One of these doctors was quite confident, that the cry of a dog on receiving the lash of a whip, was only the same kind of noise which a spring sometimes makes when put in motion. Our abbé, who had sat hitherto silent, turned to the discoverer of the spring, and said:

“ Will you permit me to give an unanswerable reply to that ? ”

“ Unanswerable ! do you say ? ”

“ Yes,” said the Abbé ; “ but adjourn the decision until the evening.”

“ Oh ! ” cried his opponents. “ He wishes to be off ; he is afraid ! ”

“ Well ; you will see,” answered the Abbé.

Here the matter rested ; but evening came, and all the parties were re-assembled except the Abbé.

“ Oh ! ” exclaimed the Descartesians, “ it is clear he has nothing to say ; he dare not make his appearance.”

Meanwhile a stranger entered, and the abbé was for the moment forgotten. It was a new prisoner, M. Blanchard, late commissary-general for the army. I have already described the manner in which new prisoners were welcomed, and we received M. Blanchard in the usual style. His heart was full of anguish, for he had just been violently torn from his wife and daughter. He incessantly repeated their names, “ Philippine ! Amelie ! ” while the tears streamed from his eyes. As he gave audible utterance to these names, a dog, which had at first stopped at the door, rushed towards his master, giving a most melancholy howl. “ Yes ! yes ! ” said the unhappy man, “ he weeps with me. He is a friend, gentlemen ; he

has been with us through all our troubles; he loves my wife, he loves my daughter. Do you *not* love them?" said he to the dog, and the tears dropped on the fine animal's head while he pressed it to his knees. "Amelie! Philippine!" Every time their names were pronounced the dog howled piteously, displayed the greatest agitation, and turned in every direction, as if trying whether he could not discover the beloved objects and bring them to his master.

This spectacle affected every one; the great partisan of Descartes was moved as well as others. He approached the dog and caressed him; but in a moment, reflecting that he ought not to concede, he drew back. The abbé was behind him, and whispered in his ear, "Is *that* a mere machine?"

I need scarcely add, that the abbé had been previously informed by Vaubertrand of the arrival of M. Blanchard, and of the touching fidelity and affection of his dog.

I could not think of leaving the story of the dog untold; and now, having noticed all my prison friends, I will close this chapter.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Our new prison.—Madame Sainville's exertions in my behalf.—Collot d'Herbois and Danton.—Six of our company condemned to the guillotine.—The Polchinello of the republic.—M. Gevandon.—His usury.—Mademoiselle Devienne's pardon and liberation from prison.—Her peculiar powers as an actress.—Excellent qualities in private life.—Talleyrand's splashed stockings.—The Abbé Delille's only pun.—Filial affection of Mademoiselle Devienne.—Unexpected meeting with her father.—Her mother's prejudice against theatres and actors.—Conversion.

OUR party of theatrical prisoners were now removed to a more comfortable place of confinement. Our new prison afforded us the advantages of improved air and extended space. We had the privilege of walking in vast corridors, which were ventilated by large windows looking out to the gardens of the old convent. We could gaze upon the blue sky and the verdant grass—sights which seem to impart new life to those who have lingered long in close captivity. I was born in 1751, and yet

it was not till 1794 that I learned to worship the glory of spring.

We were removed in hackney-coaches, three of us being seated in each. We were not handcuffed, nor subjected to any kind of restraint, and with the exception of being growled at on our entrance by a huge dog, who, machine as Descartes might have called him, had been taught to recognise the prisoners for the purpose of stopping them in case of any attempt to escape, we were treated with a degree of consideration for which we felt grateful. Moreover, we were given to understand that we should soon be permitted to receive the visits of our friends and relations. But these permissions were not very easily obtained. They were issued with the names blank, and thus they became objects of traffic among the porters and turnkeys, who sold and re-sold them, so that their prices rose and fell alternately, like stock on the exchange.

This sort of traffic would probably have rendered it difficult for me to obtain very frequently permission to receive a visit from a friend, had it not been for the kind intervention of M. Trouvé, who was at that time connected with the literary department of the "Moniteur." Since that time M. Trouvé has become possessed of a brilliant fortune; and few men better deserve to enjoy

prosperity, or know how to make a better use of it. He never neglected the opportunity of serving any one to whom his assistance could be useful. I here denounce him as a conspirator to whom the Comédie Française owes many profound obligations, hoping that this betrayal of his goodness will not wound his delicacy.

But first let me render the tribute due to my kind and affectionate sister Felicité . . . To her who was a mother to my daughter, a guide to my son, and a consolation to my aged father . . . to her whose meek and patient spirit now rests after a life of weary trial . . . let me render my debt of grateful affection.

My sister Felicité (who became by marriage Madame Sainville) had performed in the same theatrical company with Collot d'Herbois, at Bordeaux. She had preserved his honour and even saved his life, when they were both compromised by his being implicated in a serious affair. Felicité prevailed on M. Duhamel, who was then *echer*in of the district, to connive in the escape of Collot d'Herbois. This sort of service is not easily forgotten, and my sister had a right to expect that, when he rose to power and importance, he would gladly embrace an opportunity of discharging his debt of gratitude. Full of hope, she took him a petition in my behalf. He readily granted her

an audience, and she interpreted that circumstance favourably. Poor Felicité! how greatly was she deceived! Collot d'Herbois answered her very briefly, and with an off-hand air of confidence, which he never knew how to assume when he was on the stage, said, "You interceded for me once, that's true; but times are changed, and you come to intercede to me in behalf of another. I can give you no hope. Your brother is an aristocrat, and he must suffer as others have done."

Deeply grieved, but still clinging to hope, she then repaired to Danton, who in several instances had shown himself alive to the calls of humanity. He, like Collot d'Herbois, readily granted her an audience; but at the end of her appeal dismissed my sister most harshly and violently. Poor Felicité returned home with a heavy heart, and with the painful conviction that *nature*, the favourite word in the new revolutionary vocabulary, had no more power over the feelings than the prohibited word *gratitude*.

Meanwhile the doom which had so long threatened me and my friends, now seemed to be not far distant. I learned that Collot d'Herbois had written to Fouquier-Tinville, recommending that judgment should be speedily pronounced on six of us, who were considered to have been the most culpable. It was easy to guess the probable issue

of the case. According to custom, the packets of documents relating to each case were separately tied up, and endorsed with red ink, with a fatal letter, which letter was intended to be a signal to the judge presiding at the pliant tribunal. A large G. signified *guillotine*, or death; a D. stood for *deportation*, or banishment; and an R. indicated *remise*, reprieve, or possibly acquittal. Now it happened that the documents relating to our six cases were endorsed thus:—

Dazincourt	G.
Fleury	G.
Louise Contat	G.
Emilie Contat	G.
Raucourt	G.
Lange	G.

Not content with inscribing the fatal letters, which marked these sentences of decapitation, the grateful Collot added a postscript, which precluded all appeal. At a subsequent period I was enabled to gain a sight of this note, which was written by the man who, in return for what he owed my sister, wished to release me from the cares of the world, in company with five of my most valued friends. The note was as follows:—

“The Committee sends you, citizen, the documents relating to the actors of the Comédie Fran-

caise. You know, as all patriots do, that their conduct has been counter-revolutionary in the extreme. You must bring them to trial on the 13th Messidor. With regard to the others, there are some among them who may be punished with banishment. But we will see what can be done with them after the others have been tried.

“ Signed. COLLOT D’HERBOIS.”

Nearly nine months had now elapsed since our arrest, and it was deemed advisable to show a little clemency towards some of us, by way of an excuse for being rigorous with the others. To have sent the *élite* of the company of the *Comédie Française* to the scaffold would have been too violent a measure of revolutionary justice. We were not ordinary victims, and our case was sure to claim a large share of public sympathy. Actors are a class of people for whom the mass of the French public cherish a more than common degree of interest. The feeling with which they are regarded is not respect, and perhaps not admiration ; but it partakes in some degree of both, mingled with a little spice of gratitude. The love of the French people for theatrical amusements is a pledge for the interest that is felt in the fate of the players. The sight of a player off the stage never fails with them to revive the recollection

of some theatrical performance, some *fête*, some pleasant evening's amusement. Even where there is no sovereign people, as in Republican France, the public exercise an absolute sovereignty at a theatre; and with the existence of every favourite actor are united illusions, which belong to the history of a nation's pleasures. Therefore we may reasonably reckon on being objects of popular sympathy, in a country where such a theatrical feeling exists.

An example of this occurred in the case of Michot. An infuriated mob pursued him along the Place de Grève. What might have been his offence I do not precisely know, but I believe it was that he had been mistaken for a *Fermier-general*.—"To the lamp-post! to the lamp-post with him!" exclaimed the mob. (The lamp-post serving in those palmy days of liberty as an extempore gibbet.) No sooner said than done—the fatal cord was adjusted round the throat of poor Michot; when just at the moment a man who had forced his way through the crowd recognized the victim.—"How!" exclaimed he; "what are you at?—Don't you know that this is the *Polchinello* of the Republic?" These words saved Michot. He was immediately set at liberty, and his assailants expressed no little satisfaction at the timely discovery of their mistake. The *Citizen* would

have been hanged without merey ; but *Polchinello* was borne away in triumph.

The committee which was destined to decide our fate, divided us into separate classes, for the purpose of dividing interest and simulating justice. In the list which I have above transcribed, the reader will have perceived that six of us were marked with the fatal G, a few were to be liberated, and the rest were to be banished. Mademoiselle Devienne had been placed on the list of those condemned to banishment ; but even during the crisis of the reign of terror, friendship could work miracles, and our estimable friend obtained a pardon.

For her deliverance she was indebted to the powerful intercession of Vouland, one of the members of the Committee of Public Safety, who interested himself for her at the request of M. Gevaudan, a great army contractor. To contract for the supply of the army required, at that time, vast pecuniary means, and M. Gevaudan's fortune was considerable. He used his powerful interest in behalf of some of our theatrical colleagues. In this good work his money assisted us not a little ; but his persevering energy still more. Still though a man of the most generous and honourable feeling, he did not in every instance afford us his services gratis. He may even be said to have lent

them at a large rate of interest ; and subsequently the usurer took from us Mademoiselle Devienne, to whom he offered his hand and fortune.

The day on which this favourite actress was liberated was kept as a festival by her theatrical colleagues who still remained in durance. Mademoiselle Devienne seemed to have kindled for us a ray of hope, and we all rejoiced that she was the first of our party on whom good fortune had deigned to smile. We all knew her kindheartedness, and readiness to assist any one in trouble or difficulty ; for my own part, I felt convinced that her friendship for me would never relax.

What a charming actress she was ; and now, in the retirement of private life, what a charm she diffuses through the chosen circle of friends whom she occasionally assembles around her. On the stage she evinced all that quickness and delicate tact, which render the actor independent of the author.* Devienne could impart spirit and effect to a dialogue in itself dull and pointless. By a look or a gesture she made a bon-mot ; by an inflexion of her voice, or a pause, she could give meaning to a line which otherwise would have been meaningless. She understood Marivaux ; but she made Molière understood. The talents with which nature had lavishly endowed her, and which made her so accomplished an actress, would

have raised her to celebrity in any station of life as well as on the stage. Yet such was Devienne's self-denial, and aversion from any thing like display, that she never exercised in private life those peculiar talents which had won for her so large a share of public favour. Her manner off the stage was simple, unaffected, and modest. When in her own house, presiding amidst a small circle of friends, she was truly charming; but in a large assemblage of company she seldom attracted attention. Unlike Contat, she never reigned the queen of drawing-room conversation, or, as it may be called, conversation in full-dress; nor could she, like Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe, maintain a running fire of repartee.

Devienne, in her country house at Orleans, was a perfect embodiment of *la bonne Chatelaine*; and the charming grace of her manners was equalled only by the goodness of her disposition. In proof of the excellence of her filial feeling, I will relate the following history.

Five or six days before the festival of the first grand federation, and at a time when liberty presented herself under so fair an aspect, I happened to be taking a stroll round the Champ de Mars. It was delightful then to witness the feeling of concord and fraternity which seemed as it were to unite together a million of citizens into one single

family. I remember on that day I saw M. de Talleyrand's silk stockings covered with mud by a passing wheelbarrow, and was mightily amused by the good-humoured gaiety of the Abbé Delille. On this occasion I heard him utter the only pun he ever made in his life. The ladies, with whom he was in company, had been since the early part of the morning in the Champ de Mars, and were not merely tired, but almost famished. On hearing them complain of hunger, the Abbé advised them to apply to the *Fee des rations*. (Federation.)

I had no sooner taken leave of the Abbé and his party than I saw Mademoiselle Devienne advancing towards me, her face beaming with cheerfulness and contentment.

“What patriotism!” exclaimed I.

“What joy!” replied she.

“You are quite radiant to-day.”

“No wonder,” said Devienne, “for I am truly happy. I have to-day recovered a pleasure of which I have been long deprived; I possess it now, and never will again relinquish it.”

Then drawing me a few paces forward, she pointed to a distant object, which was not very discernible amidst the confused mass; I at least was unable to discover to what she was endeavouring to attract my attention, for her indications consisted merely of exclamations of joy. At first

I thought she was pointing to Lafayette, who was at that moment crossing the Champ-de-Mars, sword in hand, at the head of the staff of the National Guard.

"Is all this ecstasy excited by the presence of the hero of America?" said I.

"No," replied she, "not by the general, though I am not among his least ardent admirers. The man dearest to me in all this vast assemblage, is he—*there* in the ranks of the National Guard. . . . that venerable man, with grey hair, is my father."

"Your father?" said I.

"Yes," answered Devienne, "I have found him here to-day ; he has seen and recognized me. . . . He knew his daughter, though changed, as he says I am, into a fine lady. . . . Oh, Fleury, I cannot tell you how happy this meeting has made me. . . . I have at length embraced my beloved parent, and he has promised to come to live with me. You must come and see us ; I am sure you will like him.

In explanation of this unexpected meeting, I must acquaint the reader that the family of Mademoiselle Devienne were inhabitants of Lyons, where they had been settled for several generations. They were honest industrious artisans of unblemished character, and such was the respect

in which they were held, that the good people of Lyons spoke of their Thévenins with a feeling of pride, similar to that with which the French nobility talk of their Montmorencys. This Thévenin, who was the eldest branch of the family, and the representative of the ancient honour of his ancestors, married a pretty girl, and their union was blessed by a lovely family; proving the truth of the old French proverb: "*Bon sang ne peut mentir.*"

But fate had prepared a change in the hitherto unvaried occupation of the silk weaver's family. Among his children there was a daughter, whom the Comic Muse had marked out as one of her most favourite votaries. She was taken one night to the theatre of Lyons by some friends. This was a singular incident, for Madame Thévenin carried her piety to such a rigorous extreme, as to regard the theatre as a place of perdition. The attractions of the mimic scene, however, determined the future career of her charming daughter, who, a few years subsequently, having passed through a course of instruction under Prévile, made her appearance under the assumed name of Devienne on the first stage of Europe.

At the time of her *débüt*, Mademoiselle Fanier and Madame Dugazon were about to retire, and Madame Bellecourt was no longer a fitting representative of Molière's *soubrettes*. This moment

might have been deemed highly favourable for the appearance of a talented young actress, but that Mademoiselle Joly was still on the stage. In rivalry with *her*, success was difficult; and, consequently, the triumph of the young *débutante* was the more marked. But I must not dwell on the triumph which crowned the talents of my fair comrade: that is sufficiently well known. My purpose here is to speak of Devienne, not as an actress, but to render the tribute due to her merits as a woman.

Whilst this actress was surrounded by the enchantments of fortune and celebrity, the *woman* had her sorrows and regrets. Love for her art had caused her to forsake her home, and a fond remembrance of her parents and family embittered the contentment which would otherwise have accompanied her success. How great then was her happiness when she recognised her father at the Champ-de-Mars. . . . that father, who in spite of long separation instantly recognised her, though elegantly dressed. He was one of the deputies from Lyons to the Federation. The father and daughter embraced each other in the presence of the assembled multitude, and old Thévenin consented to remain in Paris and reside with Devienne.

But there was another object to be gained.

Her mother was in Lyons, and as rigid and prejudiced as ever. How could Devienne hope to win her reconciliation? Only by renouncing the stage; a sacrifice under any circumstances difficult, but now more so than ever, since her parents' advancing years and altered circumstances demanded that pecuniary aid, which Devienne's professional emoluments would alone enable her to afford them. In manufacturing towns every political change is sensibly felt, and the revolution, in spite of its early promises, had almost ruined the trade of Lyons. Such were the considerations which Devienne suggested to Maître Thévenin, in her wish to prepare a comfortable home for her parents during their latter days.

At length, by dint of urgent letters, and the representations of persons who had influence with her, Madame Thévenin was prevailed on to consent to quit her native city and remove to Paris. She began to pack up, but not till after she had settled an important clause in the contract, which was, that her daughter should never speak to her on the subject of the theatre. With the exception of Devienne, she was the first of the family in the female line who had ever ventured to wander so far from her native home.

Meanwhile, Devienne had contrived and executed a little scheme, which appeared to her cal-

culated to secure on a firmer basis the happiness of her beloved parents. She purchased, through the medium of a friend in Lyons, the whole of her father's machinery and stock, which was transferred to Paris under the safeguard of one of his workmen, who had been long in his employment, and who would have evinced much more grief at the separation which his master so deeply regretted, had he not been in the happy secret.

At length Thévenin and his wife were fairly installed in the elegant residence of their daughter, which was the resort of all the most brilliant company in Paris. Devienne's drawing-room was speedily adorned with a portrait of her father attired in his Sunday suit, with his shirt-frill finely small-plaited. His wife's likeness was soon hung as a pendant to it, the good lady being painted in best brocaded silk gown, and her Lyonnese *cornette*. Dukes, counts, marquisses and barons, literary men and artists, all rendered homage to these portraits, by bowing to them whenever they entered the drawing-room of the favourite actress. Devienne felt proud to show the likenesses of her revered parents, but still more proud to introduce the originals to her visitors. She seated them at table in company with her most noble guests, by whom they were treated with every mark of consideration.

Distinctions, however, are sometimes more irksome than gratifying to persons unaccustomed to them. So it proved in the case of the worthy silk-weaver and his wife ; and after a time they begged that their daughter would fulfil a promise she had made them when they first consented to settle in Paris, to let them have a home of their own ; a small house, in which they might live with less ceremony ; where Thévenin might indulge in his old custom of shaving only once a week, and where his wife might employ herself in her daily task of knitting. Devienne acceded to their wishes : the house was taken, and all preliminary arrangements having been completed, the worthy couple installed themselves in their new abode, which was small and neat, in a pleasant situation, and furnished with the nicest regard to the comfort of its future occupants. What, however, were the joy and astonishment of Thévenin, when, on entering a small sort of a workshop belonging to the premises, he beheld his loom and all the other articles used in his business, which he had left behind him at Lyons, and at the same time recognised the workman who had so long been his faithful assistant. Then there was a little garden prettily laid out in flower-beds, and a few perches of grass-plot on which a goat was browsing—it was the favourite goat to which Thévenin's wife had bade

a last farewell when she set out for Paris, and which had arrived that same morning by the *malleposte*.

There was only one thing which rendered the happiness of Devienne incomplete; her mother's prejudice against the stage. A natural vanity led her to wish that her parents should see her in some of her favourite characters; we always feel gratified to display our success to those whose affection is dear to us. Maître Thévenin was less obstinate than his wife; he had ventured to see one of those performances which excited so much public admiration, and felt proud of being the father of so fascinating and clever a woman. He now used his utmost efforts to persuade his wife to go and see the acting of their accomplished daughter. But Madame Thévenin continued obdurate, until the intervention of a third party brought the matter to a successful issue. The concession was made at the earnest solicitation of a lady of rank, who was a particular friend of Devienne, and who had conceived a high respect for her mother. This lady undertook the task of overcoming the scruples of Madame Thévenin.

This task was no very easy one. The old lady's prejudices were strongly rooted. "The visitors of a theatre," she said, "could not hope for salvation. . . . Sentiments were broached on the stage

which no good Christian or sound moralist could sanction," &c. &c.

"Well, madame," said the lady one day, when she had almost lost her patience in listening to the puritanical doctrines of Devienne's mother, "I hope you do not mean to say that either my moral or religious principles are very much at fault."

"Oh! madame," said she, "how can you imagine . . . ?"

"I go very often to the theatre," said the lady.

"Yes," replied Madame Thévenin; "we all have our own ideas on these questions."

"But, madame," urged the lady, "we ought not to have wrong ideas; and I hope I am not more ready to embrace wrong ideas than my neighbours. In short, my dear Madame Thévenin, if you do not consent to accept a place in my box, and to accompany me to the theatre, I cannot help suspecting that you think *my* conduct incorrect because I go."

Poor Madame Thévenin did not well know what to say to this. At length, after some further arguments and solicitations on the part of the lady, for whom she entertained a sincere feeling of respect, she consented to go to the theatre, and yet exert all her might to resist the temptations of Satan.

On the night fixed for this long-wished-for

visit, the play was "Athalie," and Devienne was to play a part in the afterpiece. Madame Thévenin drew back into a corner of the box; she cast down her eyes, and held her hands over her ears, and in this manner got over the first act with a tolerably easy conscience. On the commencement of the second, the good lady began to be weary of her irksome attitude. She rested one of her hands on her knee, and at that moment some of the words of Josabet fell gently on her ear. The harmony of Racine's poetry operated like a spell, and in a few moments both ears were open to receive it. The boyish voice of Joas was next heard, and the good lady raised her eyes and directed an almost stealthy glance to the stage. She now both looked and listened. She was at once amazed and captivated by the splendour of the temple and the beauty of the poetry, of which every line brought to her mind reminiscences of her Bible. As the progress of the piece advanced, Madame Thévenin's interest and admiration increased. She rested her elbows on the box, and supporting her head on her hands she gazed and listened with the most earnest attention. The children of Levi appear, the harmonious chords of the harps resound, a sublime melody accompanies the transports of Joad,—and Joad himself, the high-priest, the inspired prophet, predicts the

New Jerusalem. The sacred grandeur of the whole scene, together with the captivating strains of the accompanying music, penetrated the heart of the pious convert. Her eyes were suffused with tears; and inspired by her feeling of religion and divine love, she bowed her head, dropped on her knees, and devoutly made the sign of the cross.

This conversion rendered Mademoiselle Devienne truly happy. I might relate twenty anecdotes illustrative of her excellent feeling, and her exemplary conduct to her parents and her family; but the particulars I have above narrated will suffice to show that Devienne possessed higher qualities than even her professional talents, great as those talents were. After her liberation from prison, she made the most strenuous exertions to obtain the release of her theatrical comrades. In her endeavours to accomplish this object, she even incurred the risk of compromising her own safety; she had however the mortification to find her efforts were unavailing. The individual to whom we owed our deliverance evinced in the accomplishment of his object an extraordinary share of courage and presence of mind. But this story must form the subject of another chapter.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Charles de Labussière.—His appointment under the Committee of Public Safety.—His efforts in behalf of revolutionary victims.—Accusatory documents.—Method devised by De Labussière for destroying them.—Noyades.—Fouquier-Tinville's letter.—Danger encountered by De Labussière in his exertions to save us.—Scene in a corps-de-garde.—Madame de Beauharnois saved by De Labussière.

WE owed our deliverance, in a most curious way, to a man who at that time held a post under the Committee of Public Safety. This man was Charles de Labussière. But for him, the Comedie Française must assuredly have paid its tithe to Fouquier-Tinville. The zeal and devotedness of our friends and relatives, the urgent intercession of persons who still possessed some political influence, and who cherished an interest for the dramatic art,—all would have been unavailing,—we must have been sacrificed, had not Charles de Labussière devised a scheme for saving us.

Like many others, Labussière lost his fortune when the revolution took a violent and decided course, at which time he became what was then termed a *motionnaire* and an *alarmiste*. Threatened with danger on every side, he knew not where to fly for refuge, when a friend, who was connected with the government, and who knew that Labussière's name was inscribed in the catalogue of the *suspected*, offered to procure him a place under the Committee of Public Safety. A more acceptable proposition could not be made to a man who was compromised. The most secure place of concealment was in the enemy's camp. Nevertheless De Labussière at first returned a blank refusal to the offer. He was warned that the thunderbolt would soon break over his head; and at length yielding to the urgent importunities of friends, who were affectionately interested for his safety, he accepted the proffered post.

He was first installed in the *Bureau de la Correspondance*, an office to which were addressed all the denunciations emanating from the different departments of the government. He speedily became disgusted at the injustice of the accusations, and the inhumanity of the accusers. He wished to relinquish his situation; but the friend who had procured it for him, assured him that his resignation would in all probability cost him his head. With

the view of diminishing some of the unpleasantness of De Labussière's position, the friend above alluded to succeeded in getting him transferred to the *Bureau des Pièces accusatives*, an office in which the lists of prisoners were registered. This was a fortunate circumstance for me and my fellow prisoners of the Comedie Française, as it also was to many other victims whom De Labussière's situation enabled him to serve.

De Labussière was installed in this general depository for documents relating to prisoners, and through his hands passed the denunciations which formed the groundwork of arrests, together with the lists styled *états raisonnés*, and the notes termed *notes individuelles*. To the same office the justificatory documents were likewise addressed; and all these papers came daily under his examination. His appointment to this dangerous and difficult post enabled him to save many unfortunate victims, although in so doing, he frequently hazarded his own life, and sometimes the lives of his colleagues; several of the latter, to their honour be it spoken, were, like himself, men of humanity. Most of the clerks in this office had accepted their situations from the same motive which actuated De Labussière, namely, to screen themselves from unjust accusations, suggested by republican vengeance. They averted

much mischief, if they did not in every instance accomplish the good ends to which their efforts tended.

The Committee of Public Safety received from the offices above mentioned, the various documents which constituted the pretended grounds of condemnations; and such was the irregular and unbusinesslike mode of proceeding, that no account of these documents was kept, nor did the committee give any acknowledgment of having received them. I have already mentioned that the several packets were indorsed in red ink, a fact which I learned from De Labussière himself.

Before he became fully cognizant of the reckless disorder which marked the proceedings of the fatal committee, De Labussière observed a due degree of caution, and trod the ground lightly. He confined himself to abstracting occasionally a few papers from the portfolios, and thus causing some few victims to be overlooked. But he soon discovered that hundreds of lives were wantonly and blindly sacrificed, in a chaos of confusion which screened every one from responsibility. De Labussière then set to work with a bolder hand¹.

¹ The reader may form some idea of the terrible chaos here alluded to, from the following passage in the *Mémoires* of Joseph Marie de l'Épinard :—"In my prison," he says, "and subsequently at the Conciergerie, I heard the jailors calling over the

“ In all cases,” said Labussière (I here quote his own words), “ in which I found the heads of families compromised, I spared no efforts to save them, without reference to the supposed justice or injustice of the offences with which they were charged. It appeared to me that to save a father and mother was frequently equivalent to saving a whole family, especially in those ranks of life in which children must depend on their parents’ exertions for actual subsistence. When I had abstracted the documents containing the charges against my predestined prisoners, I carefully deposited them in my strong oaken drawer, locking it carefully. But it was requisite that the executioner should do some work for his wages ;—without that, all would have been discovered, and I should myself have been lost in my efforts to save others. I tied up the fatal portfolio, leaving in it, all the papers with which I could not venture to meddle. These papers compromised all the heads which it was necessary to consign to the devouring

names of prisoners who were to be liberated, the charges against them not having been substantiated ;—but it was found that several of those persons had been guillotined. One day a list was brought in, containing the names of upwards of eighty persons acquitted by the Committee of Public Safety, and it was discovered that sixty-two of the number had been previously brought to the block.” Who would not work for a revolution ?

hydra. All went off successfully, and I gained for myself the reputation of being a most zealous servant of the Republic,—a reputation which screened me from suspicion when I happened to be seen at unusual hours and in extraordinary places. We were then in the summer season, and at one o'clock in the morning I presented myself at the Tuilleries, where the Committee of Public Safety held its sittings, and where my office was likewise situated. I pretended to be going to attend the sittings of the Committee, and accordingly always made choice of those hours when I knew the members were deliberating. Fortunately I was not personally known to every one, and the porters having merely to look at my *carte d'entrée*, I soon slipped out of sight, and gained my office. The keys were deposited in a certain spot, known only to my clerk and myself. I entered softly, and without a light, groping my way to the desk drawer where I had placed the papers which I had secreted during the day. How joyful I was the first time I thus saved two or three unfortunate beings from certain death! But what embarrassment succeeded those first feelings of joy? What am I to do with these papers? was the question I asked myself. It was easy to enter; but on going out, I knew that I must encounter a vigilant surveillance. The very first night on which I ven-

tured to put this scheme into execution, I held in my hands the lives of MM. de La Tour-du-Pin, de Villeroy, d'Estaing, and de Gouvernay ;—of M. de Sénéchalles, his wife and daughter, and of Madame le Prestre and her two youthful daughters ! Here was a prize. Yet what was to be done ? The packet of papers was voluminous. To burn them was impossible. A blaze of fire in the summer season would have attracted observation. I racked my brain to devise some scheme for destroying or concealing the papers, until at length I brought on an insufferable head-ache. A pail of water had been placed in the apartment, for the purpose of cooling the wine which we partook of at lunch. With the intention of bathing my burning forehead, I plunged my hand into the pail. This act suggested a thought to me. Might I not destroy the fatal papers, or at least diminish their bulk, by soaking them in the water ? Ah ! I exclaimed within myself, the Revolution has had its *noyades* for the work of death, may I not have my *noyades* for the work of deliverance ? I instantly tried the scheme. I plunged the papers into the water, and by dint of squeezing, and pressing them with my fingers, I reduced them to a soft paste, and then rolled them up in several little balls, which I easily found means to conceal in my pockets. One idea naturally leads to another, and the device which I

thus put into practice suggested to me a system of total destruction. I repaired to the *Bains Vigier*, and having subdivided my large paper balls into small ones, I threw them into the bath. My little flotilla of Revolutionary victims being thus fairly launched, I anxiously watched its triumphant progress as it floated along the bank of the *Plâce de la Révolution*."

Thanks to the courage of Charles de Labussière, upwards of eight hundred of these accusatory documents were in this manner destroyed before the first Messidor of the year II.

Our turn arrived; and in addition to the list quoted in the last chapter, in which I had the honour to figure next in rank to Dazincourt, no less than nine accusatory papers were arrayed against us. Not nine against us all, be it understood, but nine against each; that is to say, about one hundred and ninety-eight charges of offence, every one of which was punishable by the guillotine, or at least transportation. This was more than sufficient to annihilate twenty *Comédies Françaises*. De Labussière learned that it was the intention of the famous tribunal to bring our cases forward with some sort of dramatic effect. To attempt to abstract our accusatory documents was therefore a step attended with more than ordinary danger and difficulty, especially as Fouquier-Tin-

ville had about that time complained of negligence on the part of some of the clerks in his department. Nevertheless, in spite of this danger, the accusatory papers were submersed in the Bains Vigier.

On the 8th the Committee of Public Safety held its deliberations on the cases of the actors.

The accusatory documents arrived on the following day (the 9th), and on that same day De Labussière abstracted the whole from the portfolio.

On the night of the 9th, he removed the papers from the drawer in which he had concealed them.

On the 11th they were destroyed.

On the 13th it was expected that we should be summoned before the Tribunal, and on the 14th, that we should appear on the Place de la Révolution.

However, we appeared neither in the one place nor the other; and our non-appearance called forth the following letter from Fouquier-Tinville, addressed to the Superintendents of the General Police.

5th Thermidor, Year II of the French Republic.

“CITIZENS,

“The representation which was made a few days ago to the Tribunal of the Convention, proves but too true. Our *Bureau des Détenus* is filled by Royalists and Counter-revolu-

tionists, who exert all their endeavours to impede the progress of public business.

“ Within the last ten months the utmost disorder has prevailed in the documents of the committee. Of every twenty cases marked out for trial, only ten, or at most fifteen, are brought forward. A great deal of interest has been recently excited throughout Paris by the expected trial of the actors of the Comédie Française; and *as yet I have received no papers relating to this affair*. I must therefore await further instructions on the subject. It is impossible to proceed to the trials of any of the individuals under accusation, unless we are furnished with papers, mentioning at least the names of the prisoners and of the prisons in which they are confined, &c.

“ (Signed)

“ FOUQUIER-TINVILLE.”

Of all the dangers encountered by De Labussière, the greatest was that which threatened him whilst he was engaged in carrying off our papers. The presence of mind too which he evinced on that occasion was extraordinary. Florian, whose accusatory documents he carried off at the same time, used to relate with wonderful interest the adventure encountered by De Labussière on the night of the 10th Messidor, a date so memorable to the

imprisoned actors. But the readers of these volumes have not heard Florian, and unfortunately can never hear him, and therefore I scruple not to narrate the incidents which had well nigh marred our courageous deliverer's efforts to save us.

As I have mentioned above, De Labussière succeeded in removing our papers from the official depository on the night of the 9th Messidor. He had passed the sentinels and was beyond the gates of the Tuilleries. Day was not yet dawning; and whenever he was out on these nocturnal expeditions he took care not to return home during those hours which are usually allotted to repose. He never made his appearance until the usual time of rising, so that the servants and other persons in the hotel in which he resided, gave him credit for being detained out by some *liaison* of a tender nature, a suspicion which he took no pains to remove. Accordingly, on the night on which he carried off our papers, he took a stroll along the Boulevard des Italiens, until the hour arrived when he could repair to the Bains Vigier, and release himself from the packages of papers contained in his pockets. Feeling fatigued, he sat down on the steps of the Café Hardy, pensively resting his head on his hands.

From this attitude he was suddenly startled by

a heavy blow on the shoulder, given with a degree of familiarity, which seemed to indicate that it came from the hand of a friend. De Labussière quickly turned round. Never did the head of Medusa produce a more terrifying effect. The man who had given him this rough salutation was Aillaume, a zealous member of the revolutionary committee of the section of Lepelletier.

“What are you doing here?” said he.

“I am taking a walk;” was the reply.

“That’s droll enough!” said he. “Taking a walk, and sitting still!”

“After a walk,” said De Labussière, “one may possibly feel fatigued, and then it is natural to sit down.”

“Your answer is ready,” replied Aillaume. “But let me tell you that good citizens are not in the habit of walking about the streets at this extraordinary hour.”

“Well then, I suppose we are neither of us good citizens,” said the other, “for I should presume the hour is not less extraordinary for you than for me.”

“My name is Aillaume,” was the answer.

“I neither wish to know your name, nor to tell you mine,” said Charles.

“Then,” said the revolutionist, “perhaps, you may be prevailed on to tell it to some one else.”

At that moment a patrol was passing by. Aillaume called him, and De Labussière being given into custody, was immediately conveyed to a neighbouring *corps-de-garde*. His situation was fearful. He was pressed by the questions of Aillaume, surrounded by bayonnettes, his pockets were filled with his paper balls, and the packet relating to the cases of the actors was almost in sight. But in spite of all this, De Labussière did not lose his presence of mind. He firmly refused either to tell his name or to show his card. A great deal of loud altercation ensued: by degrees a crowd collected round the doors of the *corps-de-garde*, and several persons entered to inquire the cause of the uproar. Among the number was a young man, named Pierre, who was a clerk in one of the offices belonging to the Committee of Public Safety.

“What means this, citizen?” said Pierre, grasping the hand of De Labussière; “have you suffered them to arrest you by way of a joke.”

“By no means,” replied De Labussière, “I assure you I have been arrested in earnest.”

“Ha! ha!” said Pierre. “This is droll enough! You under arrest. My good fellow,” continued he, addressing himself to Aillaume, “I advise you to take care what you are about, or you will get yourself into a scrape!”

“Get myself into a scrape,” repeated Aillaume, “for doing my duty! What means this insolence? This fellow must be an accomplice. Seize him! I declare him to be suspected.”

“Take care what you are about! Do you see this?” said he, “unbuttoning his coat, and displaying the plate which all persons in the employment of the Committee of Public Safety wore suspended round their necks.”

Aillaume recognised the badge, and was dismayed. He immediately doffed his red cap, and turned timidly to De Labussière, as if fearful that he had unwittingly laid violent hands on some high and mighty power. After having somewhat collected himself, he endeavoured to apologize to Patriot Pierre.

“Oh!”—stammered he—“if you wear the medal of the Committee—that of course settles the question. I suppose this citizen can also show his medal. I hope he will pardon the mistake I have made.”

Pierre familiarly thrust his hand into De Labussière’s pocket, and triumphantly drew forth his card, which described the official situation he filled. Not content with this, he unluckily laid his hand on the packet of papers, and exclaimed:

“He has also papers here which will suffice to show who and what he is.”

De Labussière now saw that he was lost if he did not put a bold face upon the matter. Accordingly he drew our papers from his pocket, and holding the superscriptions downward, and the seals uppermost, said :—

“ I feel proud to make myself known to Citizen Aillaume, by producing these proofs of the confidence of the committee. See,” added he, breaking the seals, and running his eye rapidly over the papers, “ whose signature is this ?—Chaumette’s. Whose names are these ?—all members of the General Council of the Commune. And this ?—the signature of Collot d’Herbois.” And so he went on, unfolding the papers, rapidly folding them up again, and turning round amidst the circle, as if to exhibit the imposing signatures, but in reality to evade observation. Aillaume was overwhelmed with confusion. He was bewildering himself in his attempts to apologize, when De Labussière charitably helped him out of the difficulty.

“ My good friends,” said he, “ I am far from being offended at the conduct of Citizen Aillaume; and if I did not make myself known at first, it was only for the purpose of trying his patriotism. I feel happy in having this opportunity of congratulating him before you all, on his vigilance in

watching over the public safety. Farewell Republican ! I will take care to report your zeal to the Committee of Public Safety."

"You are a great deal too good," said Pierre, as they both left the corps-de-garde. "Were I in *your* place, I would have him severely punished."

Being once more at liberty, De Labussière lost no time in taking leave of his serviceable friend, and then hurried as usual to the bath. On arriving there, finding himself alone, he took the opportunity of glancing over the papers containing the charges against the actors of the Comédie Française. Besides the letter of Collot d'Herbois, which I have given in the preceding chapter, there was a report of the Council-General of the Commune, full of malicious and false accusations ; —moreover a virulent declaration of Chaumette, on the necessity of bringing us before the Revolutionary Tribunal ; together with numberless accusations emanating from private individuals. These documents, which formed a sort of codicil to the general accusations, referred only to the six victims who were especially singled out, of whom I was one. But the codicil was, together with all the other accusatory documents, consigned to the *noyade*.

Thus the performers of the Comédie Française

escaped the vengeance of their persecutors ; and in this manner did De Labussière, risking his own head to save others, rescue from the guillotine no less than eleven hundred victims¹.

¹ It is a curious fact that De Labussière destroyed the accusatory documents which compromised Madame de Beauharnais, whom fate subsequently raised to the imperial throne of France. But for the zealous exertions of the Clerk in the *Bureau des Décisions*, Tallien's intervention in favour of Madame de Beauharnais would have been too late. In all probability the Empress Josephine was never apprised of this fact.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

My liberation from prison.—Transformation wrought during our confinement.—First performance after our release.—Sympathy of the audience.—Desertion of the Faubourg St. Germain.—The Théâtre de la Réaction.—The Regency of the Reign of Terror.—Fashionable Jargon.—Demoustier.—Altered manners of the play-going public.—Madame de Simiane's message to General Lafayette.—Theatrical revolutions.—Proposal to reunite the scattered performers into one company.—Petition of the dramatic authors.—Beaumarchais.—The disputed point adjusted.

My liberation brought new life to my sister, and happiness to my child. But though restored to the society of the beings I most dearly loved, yet I did not experience that feeling of joy which usually animates prisoners released from confinement. The reason was that I felt somewhat in the condition of one who has been tortured on the wheel, and who is merely let out of prison to breathe the fresh air after suffering the punishment.

What transformations had been wrought during our incarceration ! Our old theatre in the Faubourg Saint-Germain now appeared under a new title and a new aspect. Its original name of *Théâtre Français* had been first converted into *Théâtre de la République*, and had been subsequently changed to *Théâtre de l'Egalité*. The internal arrangements and decorations were likewise completely altered. With the view of destroying all distinctions of rank, the partitions which separated the boxes had been removed, in order to enable the citizens to sit beside each other in union and fraternity. The boxes, by this alteration, looked like galleries ; and though the elegance of the theatre was completely destroyed by the process, the plan was certainly quite consistent with republican equality. At intervals projecting columns had been erected, rising from the first to the third tier of boxes, adorned with the busts of the most distinguished martyrs, and most ardent friends of liberty. Among the latter, that of Marat occupied the most conspicuous place. The fronts of the boxes, the draperies, and the curtain exhibited the three national colours, ranged in narrow perpendicular lines. Thus the interior of the theatre looked not unlike a vast tent, lined throughout with striped cotton. I cannot describe what were my sensations the first

time this striped curtain rose before me, and, looking from the stage, I beheld the pitiable change, not only in the theatre, but in the audience. Where were now the elegant decorations of the house? where was the elegant company that was wont to grace it? Where was the gay Champcenetz, and the brilliant Condorcet? Where were my valued friends Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe and her lovely daughter? All numbered with the dead! What a change in less than a year! Even the box which Madame de Sainte-Amaranthe had occupied, which was close upon the stage, had vanished. That box, whose draperies of fringed velvet formed so pretty a frame-work for the fair faces of its occupants, was no longer visible. The space it occupied was filled by a block of yellow marble, on which stood a colossal statue of Equality—the idol usurping the places of the victims, who had been immolated at its altar.

On the first night of performance after our liberation from prison, the theatre was thronged with friends of our party, who thus proved the sympathy they felt for us. We also had the spirit to show that we had not changed our colours; and the pieces we selected for that night were the “*Métromanie*,” and “*Les Fausses Confidences*.”

The “*Métromanie*” abounded with allusions

which the audience failed not to seize and apply to us; thus manifesting their indignation at the persecution of which we had been the victims. The piece being continually interrupted by rounds of applause, it occupied double the usual time of performance. Contat was taken ill after the first scene, but the enthusiasm of the audience speedily restored her, and she shone out brilliantly as the play advanced. As to myself, the cordial approbation conferred upon me, more than once drew tears from my eyes.

A political revolution necessarily entails changes in the habits of the people amidst whom it takes place. Among the many which had occurred since our incarceration, was the comparative desertion of the Faubourg St. Germain, many of its inhabitants having removed more into the centre of the capital. This noble quarter of Paris was now under sentence of interdiction; most of its splendid hotels were empty, and grass was growing in its principal streets. In other parts of the capital, it is true, much praise was bestowed on the spirited conduct of the actors of the *Comédie Française*. But what did that signify! By degrees our friends gave us to understand that they did not think it worth while to cross the bridges for the sake of encouraging us by their presence. This was not the way to compensate for our long

sufferings and losses. The old theatre was endeared to us by recollections of past prosperity and triumph. Yet what was to be done? Empty houses and diminishing receipts sufficiently proved the folly of remaining faithful to the temple deserted by its worshippers. Accordingly we deemed it prudent to follow the example of Mahomet;—the mountain would not move to us, so we moved to the mountain.

Sageret, the director of the Salle Feydeau, formerly the Théâtre Monsieur, offered us an asylum. We entered into an agreement to act at his theatre on the alternate nights with his operatic performance. Sageret was a shrewd, clever man, and knew how to suit the taste of the day; he saw at a glance the good account to which our co-operation might be turned by able management. The Théâtre Français accordingly became the Théâtre de la Réaction.

However, we owed this reaction not to new pieces, but to old ones; and not so much to the *chefs d'œuvres* of the old writers, as to works of a lighter kind, abounding in graceful plays of wit. The plays of Boissy, Marivaux, Gresset, Dorat, and their successors, now became the prevailing favourites. Contat, softened down her rich and exuberant vein of comic humour, into a tone of elegant *finesse*. She had always been a favourite

actress, but she was now absolutely the idol of the public. I was her indispensable partner, and I received the flattering surname of *Fleury-fleuri*.

The public taste at this time sought subjects of mere amusement; and rather avoided those which furnished food for reflection. After the terrible crisis which had just past away, people felt inclined to enjoy the present, to forget the past, and to avoid if possible looking forward to the future. Every one seemed to say with Figaro: "Who knows whether the world will last three weeks longer?" A long arrear of grief and misery was to be obliterated by pleasure. History was ransacked, not for tragic, but for graceful subjects. The Regency was the golden age of the French monarchy, and it was resolved to try a Regency of the Reign of Terror. The rigid bigotry of a great king, in former times, provoked the sudden outbreak of court libertinism; and in like manner the bigotry of patriotism created as it were an explosion of national libertinism.

This change in public taste and feeling naturally had its effect on our language and literature. Both degenerated into effeminacy; and our mother tongue was frittered away almost into a different language by those who affected excessive elegance and refinement. The harsh vocabulary of the revolutionary language was disguised by

banishing from the alphabet certain letters, which when pronounced, were thought to vibrate too harshly, and to demand too great an exertion of the organs of articulation. The banished letters were R, J, G, and H. For example an *incroyable* would give his *paole d'honneu*, instead of his *parole d'honneur*; and a *Merveilleuse*, who would declare she was fond of *pizeons*, would probably affect not to understand what was meant if asked at table to partake of a *pigeon*. In short, the French language was by a certain set of people for a time transformed into a sort of creole jargon.

This effeminate language gave birth to an enervated style of literature. The favourite writers of the day framed their language so as to avoid those vigorous and emphatic sounds, which in the works of our best authors, seem to impart energy and force to the ideas. In dramatic literature Demoustier was the great caterer to public amusement. His pieces never failed to draw crowded audiences to the theatre; and I really believe that if we could have had two performances of *le Conciliateur* and *les Femmes* twice during the twenty-four hours, we should have had the theatre filled both day and night. But this was not surprising. The natural consequence of every excess, is to bring about a contrary excess. We now shrunk from the horrible and the degenerated into mannerism

and affectation. Demoustier, who was as simple and natural in his own character, as he was affected and unnatural in his writings, was not the dupe of this ephemeral success. Before him was d'Harleville, and behind him Picard and Duval ready to tread on his heels. He knew that the spirit of true comedy was not to be found in his writings: and he hesitated not to avow this consciousness. But the revolution had given birth to monstrosities on the stage of real life as well as on the mimic scene. The public were disgusted with spectacles of a revolting and low character, and sought relief in a decided contrast.

The encreased number of play-goers by whom our benches were nightly thronged after our removal to Sageret's theatre, may be accounted for by another circumstance; viz. the numerous sudden fortunes which the revolution had created. That great national convulsion had raised a host of individuals from poverty to wealth. This class of persons might be said to be *depopularized*; but though they ceased to belong to the people, they still continued to belong to them by their habits and feelings. They were anxious that the origin of their opulence should be forgotten; and with this view they endeavoured to assume a tinge of the colouring of the old *regime*. They knew that our performances were the favourite amusements

of the proscribed nobility; they knew that it had formerly been fashionable to have boxes at our theatre; accordingly they became our frequent visitors. But still Demoustier was the favourite author, and next to him Dorat, Boissy, Marivaux, and Gresset. Molière and Lesage were thrown quite into the shade. Molière was the painter of common life. The author of the *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* could not possibly be a favourite with the class of play-goers I have just described.

But this fastidious refinement was not confined to our boxes; our pit was quite *à la fleur d'orange*. We at first feared that we should have to face the successors of the turbulent *pittites* of 91 and 92; who in the energy of their republicanism demanded our heads in exchange for a few reasonable verses which we threw at theirs. We even feared that these old worthies would be the promoted occupants of the best boxes; for in spite of the wonderful changes which every day brought forth, there seemed scarcely to have been time for the complete remoulding of theatrical audiences. To return so suddenly to Marivaux seemed a dangerous experiment. We well remembered that a passage in one of his plays prior to our imprisonment had brought down a shower of apples upon the stage, a circumstance which drew forth a humorous remark from Madame de Simiane. One

of the apples happening to roll into that lady's box, she carefully wrapped it up in paper, and sent it to General Lafayette, with the following lines written in pencil:—"My dear General, I beg leave to send you the only fruit which the revolution has brought me."

However, all our apprehensions were groundless. The occupants of our new pit were the very antipodes of those who had treated us so roughly upon the former occasions. Our new *friends* would not even indulge in the turbulence of clapping. The only tokens of approbation we received were given by joining the thumb and fourth finger of the right hand and tapping them gently on the thumb and fourth finger of the left. They had likewise suppressed the *r* in *bravo*. Indeed, if I recollect rightly, they greeted us only with *bavis-simo*. In short, it was a pit after Demoustier's own heart;—a pit that would have satisfied Dorat himself.

In the course of a little time after we removed from our old locality, there were no less than three or four theatres in Paris for the representation of the regular French drama. First, there was our company at the old Théâtre de Monsieur, (which had now changed its name to Feydeau or Sageret's Odeon Théâtre); secondly, there was the Théâtre de la République; and thirdly, there was the

Théâtre Louvois, where, under the able management of Raucourt, comedy and tragedy were alternately performed; and fourthly, the Théâtre Montausier. At this time actors turned like weathercocks, with every wind; and offered themselves indiscriminately to every different manager. One, would form an engagement from fear, another from interest, and a third from opinion, friendship, or perhaps caprice. But this was not surprising in a state of society in which every thing was unsettled and changeable. Larochelle and Jolly would desert to the Théâtre de la République, and then after a little time come back to us; next Devienne would transfer her attractions on Montausier, and then rejoin us at the Feydeau; or possibly the tragedians of the Feydeau would emigrate to the Louvois. Then Molé, attentively feeling the public pulse, would come to us and leave us, rejoin us and leave us again. With regard to the theatres, revolution and persecution were far from being at an end. At one time an order would be given for closing the Théâtre Montausier on the suspicion of *incivisme*; —at another time Feydeau would be shut up for being convicted not of too much *civisme*, but too much *civility*: in consequence of our old box-openers sometimes addressing people as Monsieur and Madame, forgetting the popular qualifications of *citoyen* and *citoyenne*. During the space of a

fortnight, Louvois would be triumphant, and we in disgrace; then we were no sooner permitted to re-open, than Louvois would be ordered to close, just as it might please the Directory to substitute power for law. At length the performers of the Louvois sought refuge at the Odeon, which opened its doors to receive them; and Sageret, not having sufficient space for their accommodation, removed to the Théâtre de la République. There the schismatic and orthodox actors were brought together face to face, and in the midst of their disagreements, they joined with all their hearts in the chorus: *Où peut-on être mieux.*

Sageret afterwards divided the company of the Théâtre Français into two distinct sections;—one called the section of the Luxembourg, and the other styled the section of the Rue de la Loi. However, none of the performers were exclusively attached to either one of these two sections. We changed our quarters almost every other night. We led a truly strolling life; and our device might have been, like that of the gypsies: *partout et nulle part.* The same actors performed, and not unfrequently the same piece was represented at the two different theatres on the same evening.

This plan of making the company do double duty, soon became a subject of discussion between us and Sageret. We had not, it is true, the right

of opposition, but we had the right of opinion, and Sageret failed not to refute us from his chair of justice. It appeared to us that this plan of theatrical management was not conducive to the interests of the dramatic art, and still less conducive to the interests of the treasury. But our manager had his answer always ready at his tongue's end. He had an illusive system of algebra of his own; and he calculated his theatrical prosperity and interests much in the same manner as a young bride calculates her matrimonial happiness. He used to say that a tradesman who has two shops ought to do more business than he who has only one. To this argument I would reply by an anecdote which I had heard related of a sovereign, who having discovered that the import duties were the most productive portion of his revenues, thought it would be a clever financial scheme to enforce their payment a second time at the gates of his capital¹.

Sageret's speculations involved him in difficulties; and the public journals have long since proclaimed throughout Europe that the magnificent Odeon theatre has been reduced to a heap of ashes. Bankruptcy and fire terminated the ruin which proscription commenced. The performers

¹ This *double* scheme was tried some years since in London, and failed.—ED.

who were scattered and separated by these disasters, began to think seriously of the advantage of forming themselves into one united company. Government seemed to be disposed to favour this scheme, and it became the subject of discussion in the public journals. However, there were many interests and passions opposed to the plan, and no class of persons seemed more hostile to it than our play-writers, who alleged for the thousandth time that a single theatre must be fatal to the interests of dramatic literature, and the dramatic art in general. I must needs confess that my individual sentiments coincided to a certain extent with theirs. I was always of opinion that two French theatres would be mutually advantageous to both ; honourable competition being no less favourable to the growth of talent, than vain rivalry is injurious to it. But the time had not yet arrived when a plurality of theatres for the representation of the regular French drama could have any prospect of success. The authors petitioned government against the scheme of a united French company, and Beaumarchais added the weighty authority of his signature to the petition. The question became the subject of much animated discussion and negotiation.

The petition of the authors naturally carried

with it great influence. They urged the expediency of dividing our company into two, which seemed to be no very easy matter, considering that we had not a sufficient number of good performers to constitute one strong and efficient corps. The majority of our members were for uniting themselves in one company; but before that union could be accomplished, it was requisite to soften down some rankling feelings of animosity which here and there peeped out. We all wished to have some security for the continuance of concord, which might otherwise be interrupted by incompatibility of humour or opinion. We tried the experiment of some preparatory tea-parties in our green-room. At first these *réunions* were but thinly attended; yet the performers who assembled at them, behaved towards each other with great cordiality. The number of guests gradually augmented: at length the little *thé* was converted into a banquet; and we had an opportunity of trying the effect of a general assembly of all the members of our company.

What a gratifying picture this assemblage presented! What a delightful union of talent and hope! How many conflicting opinions and feelings were merged in one noble sentiment—love of art! It was truly a meeting of extremes: Rome and Geneva united.

"I beg leave to speak," said Michot.

"I wish to say a few words," said Talma.

Dazincourt observed that Michot had been the first to rise.

"Let Michot speak!—let Michot speak!" resounded a chorus of voices on every side. Michot accordingly addressed the company.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said he, "it is not my intention to make a speech, but merely to narrate an apologue which appears to me to be amusing, and not altogether inapplicable to the point at issue between us. In a certain assembly, some persons affected to be embarrassed in solving the very simple arithmetical problem, how many are six and six? They appealed for information to a deputy on the left side, who quickly replied, 'six and six make twelve.'"

"Those who hear a bell, hear nothing but a sound," remarked a profound thinker, one of the members of the assembly. "Let us ask a deputy on the right side." Accordingly the question was proposed to another honourable member, who after some minutes of profound reflection, gravely said, "six and six make fourteen." The enquirers felt not a little embarrassed by these varying statements. They resolved to refer the question to some one more expert at calculation. They looked round, and fixing upon a member

in the middle of the assembly, they asked him the question. "How many do six and six make?" repeated he; "that is rather a difficult problem; what said the gentleman on the left side?" "Twelve." "And what was the answer of the member on the right?" "Fourteen." "Well then," said he, "I will be impartial—you shall hear the truth—six and six make thirteen." Now, added Michot, it appears to me that this is the history of our past opinions—the history of our errors and mistakes, of our friendships and antipathies. The fact is, ladies and gentlemen, that six and six make twelve, in spite of any differences of opinion that may exist on the subject. Let us unite in friendly concord; for that is the way to promote the interests of the French drama. I again repeat that six and six make twelve, and let those who are of that opinion hold up their hands."

Almost every hand was raised in token of assent; and a prolonged *vivat* greeted Michot. Concord and satisfaction beamed on every countenance. Talma was quite elated. His fine features were lighted up with an expression of pleasure, which imparted to them additional grace. For my part, I was in a transport of joy. I flew to the bust of Molière, exclaiming, "Here is our father and patron, let us vow allegiance to him, and

amity to each other." I devoutly embraced the bust, and most of the company did the same. We joined hands around the sacred image: a compact of unity was concluded; and the Comédie Française was once more revived.

Without awaiting the formal sanction of the government, our united company opened the theatre with the "Cid" and "l'Ecole des Maris;" thus offering a tribute to the memory of the fathers of the French drama.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Napoleon's theatrical life.—His lively interest in all that concerned the Théâtre Français.—Our departure for Dresden.—Astronomical compliment.—A sovereign audience.—Suggestion for our performing at the Dresden Theatre.—My answer.—The Emperor's remark.—Election of actors to the Institute.—Interview with Count Remusat.—Napoleon's predilection for tragedy.—Modification of the imperial taste.—The "Misanthrope" performed at Court.—My retirement from the stage.—Mademoiselle Contat's illness and death.

THE Comédie Française continued to flourish prosperously during the various political vicissitudes which succeeded the period to which I have just adverted: Napoleon was himself an ardent lover of theatrical amusements, and interested himself warmly in everything relating to the drama. A volume might be written on what may be termed *Napoleon's Theatrical Life*. Not a year of his varied existence elapsed in which that extraordinary man did not in some

way or other occupy himself with the affairs of the Comédie Française. He dictated regulations for us when he was at Moscow, even during the conflagration of the Kremlin. He settled upon us one hundred thousand livres per annum, on the day when he took Vienna; and on other similar occasions we experienced his bounty. Whilst ravaging the rest of the world, he was showering favours upon us. Ah! how much we benefited by Louis XIVth's patronage of Molière!

What excitement prevailed in the green-room of the Comédie Française, on the day when Count Remusat's letter conveyed to us the Emperor's order that a portion of our company was to proceed to Dresden. Who was to go? and who was not to go? were the enquiries anxiously repeated from mouth to mouth. Those who had not been chosen were in despair; and the elect were transported with joy. To perform before a pit of crowned heads was an honour that could occur but once in the life of an actor. So we all thought at that time; but unfortunately we were mistaken. We had a second opportunity of performing to an audience of sovereigns; but it was when they came to us as invaders. At Dresden, on the other hand, all was glory and triumph, and we exulted in being thought of some importance in the suite of the ruler of the world.

The Emperor had commanded the presence of only the comic members of our company. This naturally gave offence to the tragedians. Why exclude the tragic Muse? said they. She is so nearly allied to kings and thrones. However, after a good deal of murmuring and solicitation, our tragedians obtained their passports, and Talma and Mademoiselle Georges soon joined our party. At first something like a little *bouderie* might be perceptible between the tragic and comic muses; but Thalia is a good tempered nymph, and she made such friendly advances to her buskined sister, that at length they both cordially shook hands, and all unpleasant feeling was at an end.

In ordering this dramatic expedition, the Emperor Napoleon merely followed up an idea of General Bonaparte. At the time of his departure for Egypt, he employed agents to engage a numerous company of actors to embark with the army. Performers of every class were required, actors, singers, and dancers. At the time this was looked upon merely as a fanciful whim which had entered his head; it was said that after having furnished matter for so many pages of history by his campaigns in Italy, the great General wished to furnish subjects for romance in Egypt. But no such thing;

the alleged whim was one of Bonaparte's shrewd perceptions. He wished to show that he dreaded the effect of *ennui* on his countrymen more than he feared the arms of the Grand Turk.

I was one of the first of our theatrical party who arrived at Dresden. We found free lodgings engaged for us, ready for our reception. Each of the principal performers was allowed fifteen hundred francs for his private expenses. In Dresden we were treated with the most marked attention. Splendid *fêtes* were continually given by the Saxon nobility; and our dramatic corps were invariably invited to them. When it happened that several entertainments were given in one evening, it was found necessary to divide our party. It was quite the fashion to invite the *Comédiens Français*, and no reunion was complete without us. This frequently embarrassed us not a little, as we often found no one among the company with whom we could enter into conversation. Desgenettes paid us an astronomical compliment, by observing that we were like erratic stars in the milky way. The Prince of Neufchâtel and Marshal Duroc had orders to treat us with every mark of consideration, and they obeyed their instructions to the letter.

Around Napoleon was assembled a court of monarchs. We used to call them the *chambel-*

lans de Paigle, a title conferred on them by Mdle. Georges. The Emperor and Empress of Austria had of their own voluntary accord come from Vienna to Dresden. Napoleon received his father and mother-in-law in the most gracious manner; and perfect harmony of feeling prevailed among the potentates. As to us actors, we in every sense played our parts to admiration. In the sovereign congress, there were, perhaps, but few who might be considered connoisseurs of acting; but, nevertheless, some of our comrades felt not a little trepidation in presenting themselves before so illustrious an audience. At the rising of the curtain, the audience usually consisted of a king, a prince royal, three emperors, two empresses, twenty princes from the shores of the Baltic and the Rhine; together with illustrious confederates and sovereign dukes innumerable. Napoleon was always the last to arrive, and when he took his seat, amidst the group of sovereigns, surrounded by the flower of European aristocracy, the spectacle was indeed a dazzling one, and excited some nervous feeling in those of our dramatic troop who gazed at, and reflected on, the brilliant presence before whom they had been summoned. As to myself, I know not whether I ought to make a merit of my self-possession, but I felt quite at my ease. When on

the stage, I had acquired the habit of fancying myself alone, or only in the presence of my fellow performers. Even at an early period of my theatrical career, before I had fully gained this power of abstracting myself from all consideration of my audience, I must frankly confess that I sometimes felt more awed by the plebeian pit in Paris, than by the imperial circle of Dresden.

By the Emperor's command we acted only three times a-week. After the few first performances, we were informed that we were at liberty to dispose of ourselves on the nights when our services were not required at court; and that we might, if we chose, make engagements at the Dresden theatre. Several of our party were tempted to accept this privilege; but I was one of those who declined it. When the suggestion was made to me, my answer was as follows:—"I came to Dresden by command of the Emperor, and for his Majesty's service. I therefore consider myself as belonging to the imperial household. I shall not perform at the Dresden theatre for money; but I will act gratis, should his Majesty be pleased so to command. I feel assured that it cannot be the Emperor's intention to make the city of Dresden remunerate persons attached to the imperial household."

This reply, which was given in a somewhat angry mood, had the effect of changing the opinions of those who had at first differed from me on the point in question, and they came round to my way of thinking. My answer was reported to the Emperor, but my name was not mentioned, for the purpose of screening me from the imperial displeasure. However, on hearing my words reported, the Emperor exclaimed,

“Fleury said this! . . . I am sure it was Fleury! . . . I know his refractory spirit . . . *Ma foi!* I shall remember this.” Then, after a moment’s pause, he added, “The French company shall perform to-morrow, gratis, at the Dresden theatre.”

This remark of the Emperor was called forth by a recollection of the following circumstance, which I may appropriately record in these volumes. During the time of the Five Directors, our two celebrated actors, Molé and Grandmenil, were members of the Institute.

This was perfectly consistent with the spirit which had presided at the foundation of that learned body, which was intended to represent within itself the whole circle of French intelligence. On the death of Molé, several members of our company aspired to the honour of succeeding him, and taking rank along with our most distin-

guished painters and sculptors. Our company met to deliberate on the question of this succession, and, as we were given to understand, that neither in the institute, nor in any higher quarter, steps had been taken towards the election of a successor to Molé, we deemed it expedient to bring the matter under the consideration of Count de Remusat, whose official duty it was to regulate and superintend the theatres. I must acquaint the reader, that at the very first moment of the question being broached, I had declared that though I wished to see two of my comrades classed among the members of the institute, yet, as far as concerned myself personally, I disclaimed all desire to enjoy the honour. To form part of the deputation, which was to wait on M. Remusat, was the limit of my ambition ; but I determined to exert my utmost efforts to support the claims of Talma or Saint-Prix as the future successor of Molé.

The affair was discussed once or twice in our meetings, and nothing more was done. The great man who ruled France, and who prided himself in being a member of the institute, might possibly have thought it presumptuous in actors to aspire to the honour of becoming his colleagues. The candidates remained tranquil, and no steps were taken to forward their claims. However, we must have

had traitors among us, for M. Remusat was soon made acquainted with the whole affair.

Some time after this, precisely at the period of the arrest of Georges and Pichegru, I had occasion to communicate with Count Remusat. I sought an interview with him in relation to some business of general interest, and in which my personal feelings were particularly concerned. At the very commencement of the conversation I could perceive that the Count was not disposed to lend a favourable ear to any thing I might have to say.

“Really,” said he, “Fleury, you appear to me unreasonable. You think that to be a distinguished actor at the Comédie Française, is to hold the highest rank in the world. You must try to reduce your pretensions. You injure your own interests.”

“Count,” replied I, “I cannot play the courtier except on the stage . . . I know my rights, and upon those I insist.”

“I beg your pardon, Fleury,” said the Count, “but your demand cannot possibly be acceded to. It is preposterous! Then again . . .”

At these words he paused, and seemed to be revolving in his mind a subject on which, I have no doubt, he would fain have addressed me at the first moment of our interview.

“Then again,” resumed he, “do you imagine I

am ignorant of the project you lately entertained of offering yourself to fill Molé's place in the Institute?"

"You have been misinformed, Count," I replied. "I had no idea of soliciting the place for myself. As soon as my comrades thought of choosing a successor for Molé, I decidedly disclaimed all intention of aspiring to the distinction; but it appeared to me that Saint-Prix and Talma might, without any undue pretension, lay claim to it. This is what I stated at the time; and my opinion remains unaltered."

"Well, Fleury," answered he, "I tell you the idea is absurd. Truly, to hear the high tone in which you speak, one may expect that some day or other, you will set up a claim to the cross of honour."

The blood mounted to my face, and I was on the point of giving vent to an ebullition of anger. But I checked my feelings, and assuming the sang-froid and peculiar manner which I was accustomed to adopt in my character in *L'Ecole des Bourgeois*, I said,

"Count, if I were a police spy, and had arrested Georges, I should have the cross of honour now."

I then immediately bowed and withdrew.

I felt that I had been imprudent; but I am bound in justice to Count Remusat to declare that

he did not betray me. For this he is entitled to my gratitude. But there was an eaves-dropper within hearing; and the Count was not a little surprised, when, on his next visit to Saint-Cloud, his sovereign master repeated to him word for word the conversation which had passed between us. From that time, the Emperor and the actor were not as cordial as they had previously been; and at Dresden his Majesty doubtless recollected my remark about the cross of honour.

Napoleon was, however, highly satisfied with our performances there. The truth is, we contributed our efforts to sustain the national superiority of France. "*Ma comédie s'est bien conduite*," said the Emperor, when giving orders for our payments and rewards. Mesdemoiselles Mars and Georges, Talma, myself, and some others, received 10,000 francs each. We felt much flattered by the imperial compliment, "*Ma comédie*," Napoleon having always manifested a marked predilection for tragedy.

This preference may be easily accounted for. Comedy depicts life as it really is, and human nature in its true colours. But this was not enough for Napoleon. He loved heroism and enthusiasm; and accordingly preferred tragedy to comedy. The former represents an artificial and conventional state of existence; and the incidents

and characters are coloured for stage effect. Voltaire's tragedies were not, however, to Napoleon's taste. He used to say they were nothing more than philosophic poems. He always expressed great dissatisfaction at what he termed Voltaire's perversion of the character of *Mahomet*. "Voltaire," he would say, "has made a grovelling villain, a mean intriguer, of the man who changed the face of the world; and *Omar* he has converted into a melo-dramatic bravo. The fact is, he travestied history to please D'Alembert and his party."

These ideas are singular; but not, I think, altogether devoid of justice. Napoleon was perhaps less just towards Molière. I know he did not like him, though he never ventured to avow his dislike. The comic philosopher frequently shows up the hero in his undress. That was not always agreeable. He who used so frequently to say, "*Il faut laver son linge sale en famille*," could not approve a writer who forces all his characters to perform that operation in the eyes of the world. Napoleon declared that had Corneille lived in his time, he would have made him a prince: he would never have said that of Molière.

But this partial opinion became modified in proportion as his power augmented. The Empress Josephine had a decided taste for comedy; and in compliance with her solicitation, the "Misan-

thrope" was performed at court. Contat was summoned; but she begged to be excused, on the ground that her age, and especially her figure, unfitted her to represent a woman of twenty. But she could not obtain exemption;—she received an imperative order to hold herself in readiness to take the character of *Celimène*. She was obliged to comply; and never acted better. At the close of the performance the Emperor said: "I had no idea of the impression which a good comedy is capable of producing. The '*Misanthrope*' has afforded me the greatest pleasure." After this testimonial of supreme favour, comedies were frequently acted at court. The pieces usually selected were Molière's "*Tartuffe*," "*Femmes Savantes*," "*Avare*," &c., together with some of the most successful of the new plays produced at the Théâtre Français.

On the day fixed for the Emperor's departure from Dresden, we received orders to return to Paris. His Majesty mounted his horse, and we stepped into the carriages prepared for us. "We must resign ourselves to the decision of victory," observed Napoleon, on his departure; and to this remark the actors earnestly said, "Amen!"

POSTSCRIPT.

I have gone through my last performance at the

Comédie Française. Another such scene, and my heart would break. It was attended at once by too much of joy and too much of sorrow. To-morrow I am to perform at Versailles for my old friend Montausier. To-morrow it will be just half-a-century since I performed for the first time on the same stage;—at that theatre which owed its glory to the management of Montausier himself. There I received lessons from Lekain, and encouragement from Dumesnil; there, too, Louis XV. made my fortune with a word. To-morrow it will be just half a century ago.

After the death of Contat, I felt a strong disinclination to remain on the stage. Poor Contat! Her death was that of a martyr and a philosopher. As the particulars connected with that event are not generally known, I will briefly relate them here. I cannot close these volumes without rendering a tribute to her memory.

Her health having been for some time in a declining state, she spoke of retiring long before the period when age would have unfitted her for her professional exertions. The first whisper of her retirement excited general dismay; and in compliance with continually renewed solicitations, she continued for several years longer on the stage. At length her health became gradually worse, and she felt herself compelled to announce her last appearance. On that occasion, she per-

formed her favourite character of the hostess in "Les Deux Pages." She sold her estate at Ivry, and took up her permanent abode in Paris, where her house was the resort of the most agreeable society in the capital. The most distinguished literary men and artists vied with each other for the favour of being admitted to Contat's salon. Devienne and Contat are remarkable examples of actresses, who after shining brilliantly on the stage, retained their supremacy and their attractions in the social relations of private life. This is in itself no small eulogium: few abdications can resist such a test.

Poor Contat died of that terrible disease, cancer; and it was by a most unlucky chance that she was made acquainted with the nature of the malady with which she was afflicted.

She had been for some time suffering from violent pain in her breast. Her medical attendant, alarmed by her increasing illness, recommended her to consult the celebrated Dubois, which she accordingly did. After some conversation with her, Dubois said, "Madame, I will prescribe a course of treatment for you, which you must scrupulously follow. Call on me again in about three days, and in the meanwhile I will see your doctor." On the appointed day, Contat repeated her visit to Dubois. He received her in his private cabinet, and after a little conversation,

he left the room, saying he should be with her again in a few moments. Casting her eyes on the doctor's writing-table, near which she was seated, Contat saw her own name written on a slip of paper. It was merely a medical prescription, and after glancing at it, she laid it down again. But beside it lay a sheet of paper half concealed, on which Contat also saw her name written. Unfortunately she took it up and read it. It was a letter which Dubois had been writing to her doctor. The first few lines over which she glanced her eye, declared that the patient was doomed; and that it would be useless to subject her to a painful operation, which could not possibly save her. Contat fainted. Dubois on his return perceived that she had perused the fatal paper. He bitterly reproached himself for having caused, though innocently, a state of mental despondency calculated to hurry the patient to the grave more speedily than even the disease itself, certain as was its fatal termination. The kind-hearted man paid her the most assiduous attention, and sought to cheer her by a faint ray of hope: but in vain; the blow had been struck.

Contat, however, betrayed no want of fortitude. At the first shock she was naturally staggered. She afterwards became almost indifferent to her situation. Her mind was cheerful; and she retained her grace and good humour to the last.

When in the midst of her family and friends, she successfully concealed her pain and anxiety. In this manner she lived two years from the time she so strangely gained the knowledge of her real condition; and it was only within a fortnight before her death that she began to complain. Thus died one of the most brilliant actresses that the French stage has ever had to boast of.

I mourned the death of Contat as I would that of a sister. With her loss, my taste for the stage began sensibly to decline, and shortly afterwards I took leave of the public. After my retirement, I began to occupy my leisure hours in retracing the foregoing recollections of my long theatrical career. Some of my readers will probably think I have told too much; whilst others will probably say I have told too little. I must confess my concurrence in the former opinion. Nevertheless I trust I may be forgiven. To those who think I have been too prolix, I may reply in the words of our old French proverb: *On n'est jamais si riche que lorsque on déménage*. Those who think I have told too little, I may answer by an observation frequently made amongst us actors; viz. that the *répertoire* may augment without becoming the richer. It will, perhaps, be asked why I have said nothing of the war between Georges and Duchesnois;—of the famous dispute with the author of the *Deux Gendres*;—why I have passed

over in silence the funeral of Rancourt, &c.?—My answer is, that all these matters are sufficiently well known; they are all occurrences of yesterday. Then again it may be remarked, I have pronounced no opinion on the talents of the performers of the present generation;—those whom I have left behind me on the stage. The reason is, that the public have the opportunity of judging for themselves. I might expatiate on the humour, the spirit, and the elegance which characterize the performances of Lafont, Michelot, Monroe, and Firmin, junior; and then I should be reproached for omitting the mention of others who have high claims to eulogy. Foremost among the number is Mdlle. Mars, the most graceful, natural, and elegant actress that ever adorned our stage; then follows a long train of young and charming *comédiennes*. Have I nothing to say of these latter? Alas, no! There are mysteries behind the scenes, which I pretend not to unravel. I say of scandal, as Henriette says of Greek: *Je n'écoute pas*. But in spite of the scandal to which actresses are exposed, I am bound to declare that I have known among them some very virtuous and very amiable women who were an honour to their sex. I shall not name them, lest I should seem invidious towards others. Thus I make an end of the subject.

I have enjoyed the patronage of three kings and one emperor; besides many other great and illus-

trious men; my theatrical career has touched upon two generations; I have mingled in the most select society of France, both noble and intellectual. I have been honoured by the advice of Voltaire, and Picard has honoured me by frequently consulting my opinion; I have dined with the banker Savalette, and have been the friend of Perrigaux; I have enjoyed the intimacy of a *Garde des sceaux*; and I have laughed at the witty repartees of my excellent notary Thirion, who has taken so much pains in settling me in possession of my sweet country retreat, and my house at Orleans. I have now my Versailles and my Tuileries.

I have escaped the misfortune of outliving my own talent. To-morrow I am to bid adieu to the public—after to-morrow, welcome future tranquillity—I shall depart for my estate; yes, I say my estate, for it once belonged to Madame de Pompadour. After to-morrow I may say to myself, what shall I do to-day? and to this question I may return an answer which I have not had it in my power to give during the sixty-two years of my professional career.

FINIS.





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